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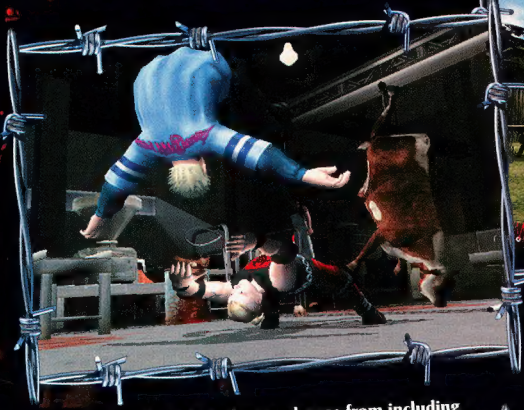

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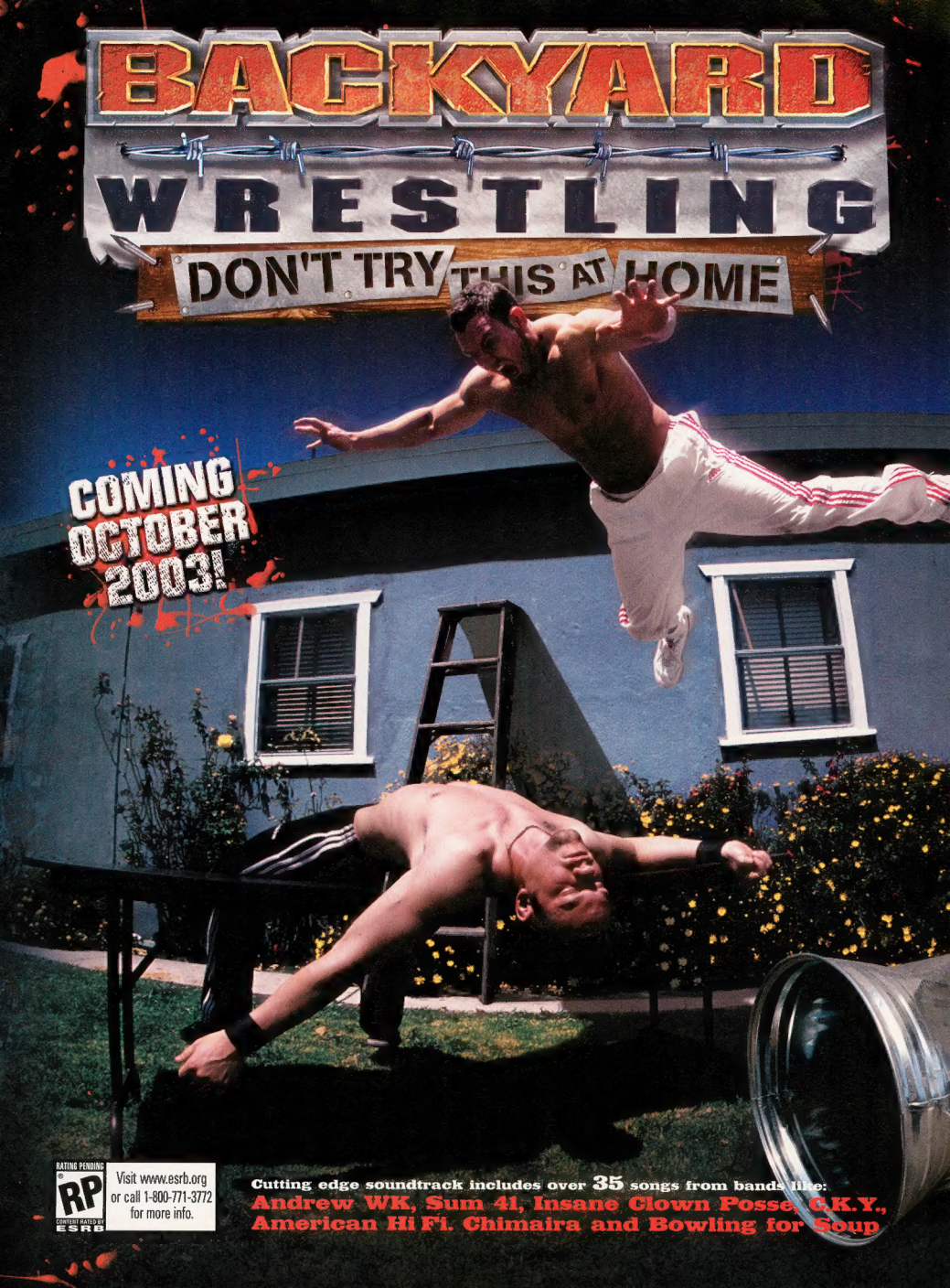
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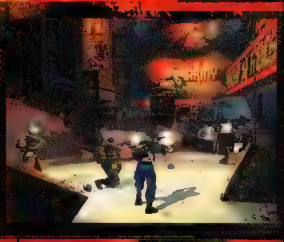

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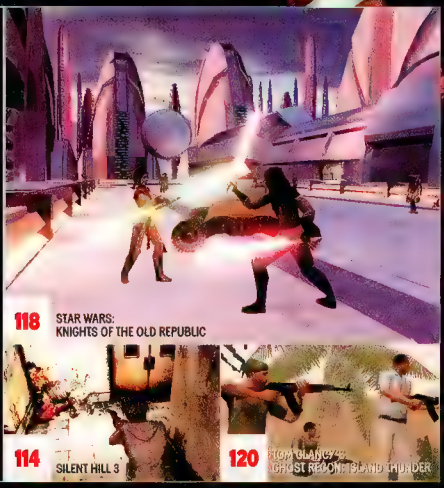

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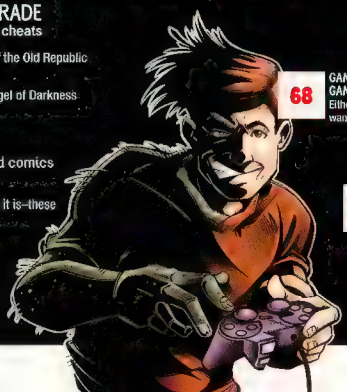

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Either way, you know you still wanna play *Grand Theft Auto*

26 SYSTEM UNDERDOGS
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COVER STORY: SOUL CALIBUR II

It's been a long four years, but the wait is over. Namco finally delivers the sequel fighting fans have been sharpening their swords for: *Soul Calibur II*. We have the exclusive reviews for the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube versions, and we tell you exactly how the U.S. releases are different (and better).

editorial

I once got up in the middle of a college math class to go play *Street Fighter II* at a local arcade. I've organized fighting-game tournaments with my friends and co-workers. I've even bet money on matches (averaging around $30 up and down on any given week). Somehow, fighting games evoke a competitive, obsessive, want-to-strangle-your-buddies-when-they-beat-you spirit that's only matched by some sports games and first-person shooters.

But it's been a while since one game has captivated so many gamers. Sure, *Virtua Fighter 4* and *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* raised a few battle-weary eyebrows, but it's this month's cover subject that will get the general public ready to take up arms again. If you're ready to fall back in love with fighting games—the type that have you playing your friends "just one more match" until the wee hours in the morning—then get ready for *Soul Calibur II*. In case you can't gauge how well we like this game from this editorial, peep your eyes at the full review on page 103. Then get ready to fight.

—*Dan "Shoe" Hsu*

Don't be a scrooge—buy all three collector's edition covers!

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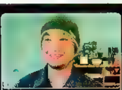


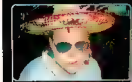
DAN "SHOE" HSU
Editor-in-Chief
Shoe's constantly inviting us over to his pad. Orgymeister? Nah—he just wants to play *Soul Calibur II*. But we avoid "sleep-overs" just in case.
Now Playing: *Soul Calibur II*, *Bombastic*, Anything having to do with *Castlevania*
Fave Genres: Everything

MARK MACDONALD
Executive Editor
Due to new regulations limiting the amount of "wacky high jinks" allowed on any one magazine page, Mark has been forced to do nothing but look slightly bored this month.
Now Playing: *Wario Ware*, *SOCOM*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Shooters

JENNIFER TSAO
Managing Editor
Jennifer ruled by fear this month, quickly turning to the dark side whenever luck-less *EGM*ers stood in her way as she battled to finish *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* on time.
Now Playing: *Star Wars: KOTOR*
Fave Genres: Action Sports, Adventure, RPG

CRISPIN BOYER
Features Editor
Cris is so fed up with finding glitches in big games like *Enter the Matrix* and *Tomb Raider*, he decided to become a glitch him-self. Hey, if you can't beat 'em....
Now Playing: *Star Wars: KOTOR*, *Wario Ware*, *Bombastic*
Fave Genres: Adventure, RPG

CHRIS "CJ" JOHNSTON
News Editor
After reviewing two volleyball games this month, CJ has developed a fear of sand, sun, and nets. His only option is to see *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* again.
Now Playing: *Tetris Worlds Online*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Puzzle



SHANE BETTENHAUSEN
Reviews Editor
Shane is so hopeless-ly addicted to *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution*'s expanded Quest mode that he's beating down fools around the office and "customizing his character" with found objects.
Now Playing: *VF4: Evo*, *Soul Calibur II*
Fave Genres: Action, RPG, Fighting

JOE FIELDER
Previews Editor
Just watching Crispin play *Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* drove Joe to drink this issue. Lemonade, that is. In a dirty glass.
Now Playing: *XIII*, *Freedom Fighters*, *Prince of Persia*
Fave Genres: Action, Shooters, Adventure

DEMIAN LINN
Editor-at-Large
Demian's having night-mares about Sega Sports' First-Person mode (see page 50). Who wants to see decidedly nondreamy San Jose Shark Mike Ricci that close up?
Now Playing: *Soul Calibur II*, *G1 Jockey 3*, *WarCraft III* (PC)
Fave Genres: Action, Hockey, Racing

PAUL BYRNES
Associate Editor
Paul's favorite *Soul Calibur II* characters are Ivy and Voldo, the two with the most, uh, "niche" costumes, which makes us wonder whether he needs an intervention.
Now Playing: *SC2*, *NBA Street Vol. 2*, *Eternal Darkness*
Fave Genres: RPG, Fighting, Shooters

BRYAN INTIHAR
Associate Editor
Reviewing three foot-ball games has Bryan dreaming about his beloved Cleveland Browns making it to the Super Bowl. What's he smokin'?
Now Playing: *Star Wars: KOTOR*, *Madden NFL 2004*, *Macramé Owl*
Fave Genres: Sports, Action, Koala Breeding

SHAWN ELLIOTT
Associate Editor
Somehow, between *Soul Calibur II* match-es, Shawn found the time to make this macramé owl (peep it one time). Fellow editor Bryan gave the creation a 6 out of 10.
Now Playing: *Soul Calibur II*, *Silent Hill 3*, *Rainbow Six 3*
Fave Genres: Fighting, Shooters

JON DUDLAK
Contributing Reviewer
Unable to find a suit-able fighter in the new *Hunter* game, Dudlak came up with some concept art to put himself in the action. That's right—back the hell up.
Now Playing: *Silent Hill 3*, *Mortal Kombat: Tournament Edition*
Fave Genres: Action, Fighting, Racing

GREG FORD
Contributing Reviewer
Sure, today's football games are impressive, but can they match *NFL '95*? Ford and friend/virtual punching bag Ernie would choose the Genesis classic any day.
Now Playing: *Madden*, *Wario Ware*, *Castlevania: Harmony*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Sports

JOHN RICCIARDI
Contributing Reviewer
Ricciardi's been hooked on the Japanese version of *Hot Shots Golf Online*. We feel for the poor Japanese players who have to put up with his verbal abuse....
Now Playing: *Final Fantasy XI*, *Hot Shots Golf Online*, *F-Zero AX*
Fave Genres: Action, RPG, Sports

GREG SEWART
Contributing Reviewer
Sewart's discovered the joys of local Nova Scotia show *Trailer Park Boys*. While this whole journalism thing is fun, his new goal is to become like cat-loving, shoppin'-cart stealin' Bubbles.
Now Playing: *GT3*, *Tomb Raider: AOD*
Fave Genres: RPG, Racing, Action

the contributors

■ While researching our online gaming feature (page 92), lawyer **JEREMY HORWITZ** learned how Nintendo split Rare's intellectual property: Everything except *DK* and *Starfox* is Rare's. Bring on Xbox's *Killer Instinct 3*.... ■ Inimitable industry vet **CASEY LOE** tunes you in on the technology of high-definition gaming (page 44).... ■ Meet **JUSTIN SPEER**, self-professed Ninja Gaijin. We tapped his Far East affections for our report on Japanese games headed Stateside (page 54).... ■ **NIK SHULZ** made the ill icons for our "Ten Reasons You'll Want to Go Online This Year" article (page 92).... ■ His pens have graced the pages of Marvel Comics, but illustrator **SEAN TIFFANY** wasn't squat until *EGM* tapped his talents (page 68).... ■ A regular Renaissance writer, **DAVID KUSHNER** finds time to work for *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* when he's not signing his books about gaming history. He also tackled our feature on the benefits and risks of hardcore gaming (page 68).... ■ **ITSUO ITO** (www.itsuoito.com) sent us appropriately wacky art all the way from Tokyo for our "Good Feelings Japan Game O.K.!" feature (page 54).... ■ **OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE**'s Chris Baker was pumped to play a console beside Sony's, but little did he know the pleasure would be pure pigskin. His cohort Gary Steinman took an abysmal trip to the red planet for his review of *RTX*.... ■ Fighting-game savant and former *EGM*er Che Chou (now with **XBOX NATION**) found yet another excuse to get paid for playing *Virtua Fighter*.... ■ And Ethan Einhorn of our sister mag for the younger set, **GAMENOW**, slogged through the latest *Tomb Raider*'s interminable puzzles.

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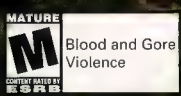

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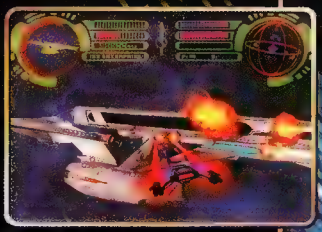

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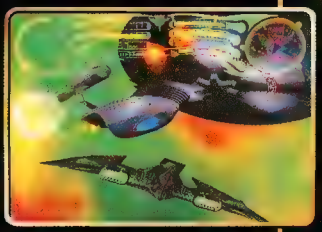

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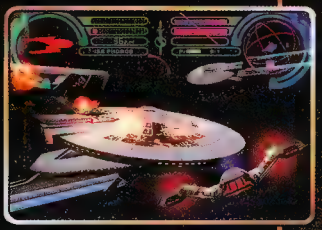

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PlayStation.2

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letters

ranting, raving, and a pet Koala named Carl

Will Thomasson, saved by videogames. Or maybe just by good driving skills.

Games 4 life

Recently, a study found that playing fast-moving videogames, such as shooters or racing games, may improve your visual processing speed and reaction time. I can certainly attest to the validity of that report. Two weeks ago, I was heading to the small town of Urbana, Virginia, when my car was struck by a tractor trailer. The truck ran off the road about 150 feet ahead of me, jack-knifed, and came straight at me sideways. Because the road was only two lanes wide, I had little room for escape; I hit my brakes, pulled into the ditch as far as possible, and leaned over toward the passenger seat, lowering my head so it wouldn't be taken off at the shoulders. I escaped with only a few small cuts on my forehead—nothing that even required stitches.

If I hadn't developed quick reflexes playing action and racing games, I probably would have just panicked and stayed right in the path of that truck. Here's a picture of my car to give you a better idea of how fortunate I am to have survived. Videogames saved my life.

—*Will Thomasson*

Contest!
Our Design A Game contest is still going great guns. No, seriously. Send us a brief description of your genius idea with a mocked-up screenshot or box art and we'll publish the best entries, starting next month. Bonus points if we laugh, quadruple infinity bonus points for a spit-take.

letter of the month

...But is it art?

Move over, Shakespeare

I found your quip about a president running on a pro-gaming platform in response to John Evans to be a source of inspiration, along with your comments on postmodern art in response to Matt Healy [Letters, *EGM* #168].

So few seem to understand what a dynamic platform gaming is for art. Not only do games have the ability to deliver the visual richness of a movie combined with a novel's long-form storytelling, but their interactivity takes it a step further, allowing players to feel like they are actively participating in the story.

Games like the *Final Fantasy* series, *Resident Evil*, *Onimusha*, *Silent Hill*, *Zone of the Enders*, *Xenogears*, and perhaps most of all *Metal Gear*, really shine in this respect. They offer deep insights into faith, humanity, politics, and the future of our culture, but mainstream society refuses to acknowledge their impact. It's like cinema at the turn of the 20th century; at the time, most laughed at the gimmick, not seeing the full potential of the medium. Seems like history is repeating itself with videogames. But it's not only up to the creators of these games to show politicians and society as a whole the impact videogames can have—it's also up to the average gamer to understand and carry on what many game designers are trying to say.

The next time an election-seeking politician steps up with some uneducated banter about how videogames are worthless wastes of time that rot your brains, we should respond, in a loud voice, that they are the fools. They're following a politically easy but ultimately wrong-headed path by denouncing a medium they haven't even tried to understand. If you want a pro-gaming platform, if you want artistic recognition, you have to tell them how much these games really mean to you.

Ryunogekido

Time, Grasshopper, give it time. In another decade or so, we may have a couple elected officials who actually like the new-fangled videogames.

Congratulations, Ryunogekido! As our Letter of the Month writer, you've won a copy of whatever game we happen to grab when we get around to sending out your prize. Don't worry—if it's really bad, we'll also include some game-related tchotchkes.

Fan service

I read the article on anime [Instant Expert, *EGM* #168], and as an anime obsessive, I'm pleased to see that you're suggesting anime and manga to other readers. But you can't become an expert just by reading a frickin' article! I mean, c'mon! You need to watch it! I saw that you suggested some Hayao Miyazaki movies, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and other kinds of anime, but still. And you don't even mention the great manga and art books based off them!

—*Julie Zook*

No, it actually turns out you can be an expert after reading just the one article. Instantly. Thanks for writing, though.

Red, blue, either way it's a pill

I've been a subscriber for a few years now, and I'm a big fan of the magazine. Nonetheless, I've got a problem with your coverage of *Enter the Matrix* over the past few months. After a long, sycophantic cover piece a few months back, May 15 came and went with no review of the game in the July issue [*EGM* #168]. As of this writing, Atari claims to have sold more than 2.5 million copies of this bug-filled movie-licensed schlock, most of which (I assume) came in the days immediately following the simultaneous release of the game and film.

I understand your policy of not reviewing incomplete copies of games for the sake of getting the first "exclusive" review, but ➤

sputtering outrage

"True" Evil Dead fan

After reading your reviews of *Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick* [*EGM* #168], I decided not to renew my subscription. You morons don't realize what a joy it is to play this after playing through the subpar *Hail to the King*. The game is 10 times more fun than *State of Emergency* and is not as hard as your reviewers think, but I guess they only played one or two levels and gave up. The plot is fun, as any true *Evil Dead* fan would agree.

Your whiny girl reviewers are the same ones who gave great marks to *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai* and *Silent Hill 2*, which was way more of a disappointment than the first *Silent Hill*. I encourage your readers to go pick games at random, since you fools obviously don't know what you're talking about.

—*Geoff Kramer*

***A Fistful of Boomstick* reviewer Demian Linn responds: "I didn't find it hard. I just thought it sucked. You like fetch quests? How 'bout you go make me a sammich? Also, get me a security card, some professor's research paper, and a silver tea set from a biker gang. Now, combine repetitive combat against enemies that respawn over and over with exactly nothing else that's fun and you have *A Fistful of Boomstick*. Glad you liked it, but we didn't."**

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LOS ANGELES IX

Shiny Prez Dave Perry (left) smiles at the success of his crappy *Matrix* game.

➤ come on! This is one of the most high profile releases in videogame history, attached at the hip to one of the most anticipated films ever made. It also happens to be a pile of ill-programmed poo. Nonetheless, the No. 1 videogame magazine failed to warn its faithful readership of this particularly disappointing release. I have to admit I feel kind of let down by it. You didn't even put the Shame of the Month logo next to the review, even though it got the lowest scores in *EGM* #169. I'm scared to think of how all of those cosplaying fanboy freaks are reacting to this fiasco! Anyway, keep up all of the (otherwise) great work.

—*Josh Nelson*

We can't review a game if they won't give it to us, Josh. And they wouldn't give it to us (we had to wait for the retail release, which meant the reviews would be published late with our lead times). In the Reviews Wrap-up [*EGM* #168, page 123] we mentioned that fact and said, "You'll be heading into the unknown if you lay down the cash." As for *Matrix* not getting Shame of the Month in *EGM* #169, that dishonor goes to "the worst game each month that *gets unanimously bad scores* [meaning less than 5.0]." *Matrix* got a pair of 3.5s and a 6.0 (out of 10), thereby disqualifying it from Shame of the Month.

If you think we were giving preferential treatment to (*Matrix* developer) Shiny, you're wrong. We asked Shiny President Dave Perry to do one of our Afterthoughts interviews, but he would not comment on any "negative feedback or story angles on the movie or the game." So we passed. Slow-pitch softball isn't very interesting to watch.

Tough luck

I am a real lacrosse lover, but there aren't any lacrosse videogames that I know of. Is there a chance for one in the future? I really want to know!

—*David Ziemlak*

Former lacrosse player and Associate Editor Bryan Intihar responds: "No and no. As much as I'd love to see it, the two of us will just have to keep dreaming the impossible dream."

It's an outrage

Is it time for April Fool's again, unbeknownst to me? In your Electronic Entertainment Expo picture gallery [*EGM* #169, page 24], I believe some of your captions are incorrect. The hot Asian girl in pleather, squatting like a pornstar? Her caption says that she is "Polio vaccine inventor Jonas Salk." The blond dancing with the gun belt is allegedly "Microprocessor co-inventor Stan Mazor." What's up?

—*Dawn Hirsch*

Polio vaccine inventor Jonas Salk is so totally psyched about curing Polio.

Ah, but have you ever met Jonas Salk or Stan Mazor? How do you know what they look like? See, this is a perfect example of the kind of rampant sexism that is so pervasive in our society today. It's shocking, we say. *Shocking*.

EA takes ball, leaves

I just don't get it. Xbox Live: great network, excellent service, and more games than you could play in months. So why would Electronic Arts alienate such a huge amount of gamers by forcing them *only* to play online with the PS2's aging hardware and a sub-par network? How can they overlook Xbox Live? I have one message to EA: I am going to love playing my shiny new copy of Sega's ESPN *NFL Football* online with all my Live friends, all 350,000+ of them, and I can't wait!

—*Matthew Schmitt* ➤

"He would not comment on negative feedback on [*Enter The Matrix*]..."

Microprocessor co-inventor Stan Mazor relates an amusing anecdote about her last visit to the Coyote Ugly bar.

OOPS!

You guys make a great magazine and all, but come on, don't you know your no-longer-pot-smoking rappers? On page 25 of *EGM* #169, you spelled *Snoop Dogg*'s name "Snoop Dog." Now, I guess that's an easy mistake, but he's Snoop Dogg. That second "g" is crucial.

—*Matt Howard*

Sorry, but it's easy to forget the double gizzle. Oops!

unedited letters

Definitely not a redneck

I have one thing to say to *GMR*'s Andrew you suck you wanna' know why you stinking pile of @#$%&, because of that little comment you made during your review of tubeslider [*EGM* #168, page 110] about NASCAR how it has boring cars, boring tracks and boring races I now hate your guts because NASCAR doesn't have boring tracks, boring cars or boring races and the only reason you don't like is because you don't understand it. There is a lot more to NACSAR than a bunch of rednecks going around a track at 200 mph. There's strategy like not to get to high on the track or you'll hit the wall and reck or knowing when to pit and what you need. One more thing if you dare call me a redneck I'll let you know that I live in Minnesota (even though I just moved here from Arizona). Now have a good day and STOP DISSING NASCAR. Your life long enemy.

—*Dillon Cagle*

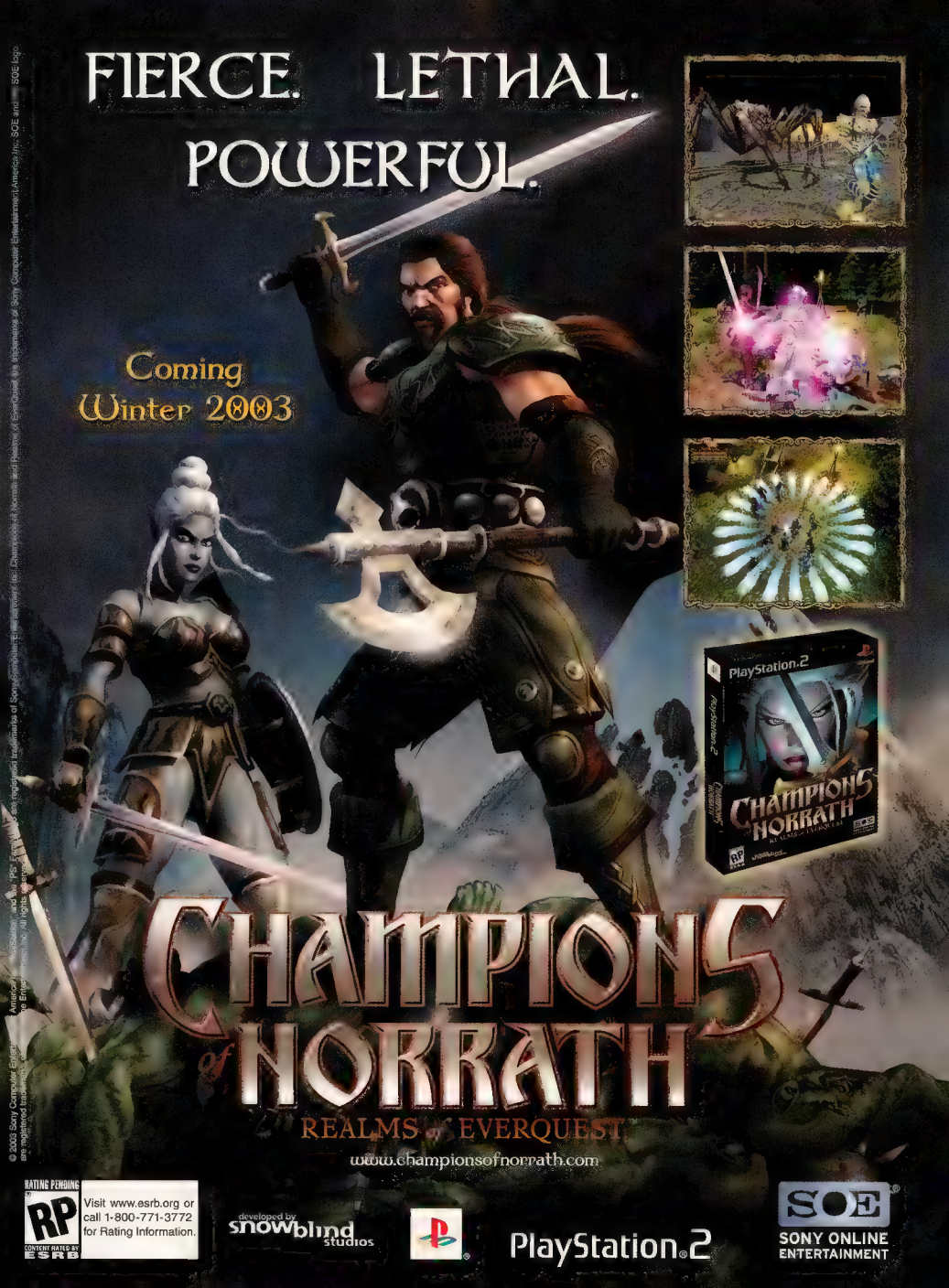
Sister mag *GMR*'s Andrew Pfister hollers down the hall: "I'm sure that even if I took the time to understand the finer nuances of NASCAR, like 'don't hit the wall' and 'when you're out of gas, stop and get more,' I still wouldn't like it, and I still would be bored. Maybe if they put small sections of ice or live animals on the track, I'd be more interested. Or jumps. Jumps are always good."

Gentle Ben

Do any of y'all know how to use spell-check? I just recieved my August 2003 edition today and I was reading it and to my surprise what did I find? On pate 50 in "NEWS BITS: TASTES GREAT LESS FILLING" I should start lubing my *Steel Batalion* controler's chasis [*Editor's note: We wrote:* "Rich Xbox gamers who blew $200 on *Steel Battalion* and its hulking controller better start lubing that thing's chassis."]. No I didn't misspell loving YOU did. I could understand the mistake though the "B" is right next to "V" but how did it get trough to the presses. Any way your only human.

—*Ben Hester*

Considering your concerted effort to misspell roughly every third word in that missive, this is a joke, right? It better be a joke. Otherwise we shudder to think at the "loving" you give your *SB* controller.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back away slowly

You can probably heat up burritos with that electricity thing you've got goin' on, eh?

I run a gaming society at Westfield High School in Houston, TX. We play all sorts of board and card games. On Fridays, we break out PS2 or Xbox and play the electronic games. What's the most popular game? *Dead or Alive 2* (she really *does* kick high). Recently, we decided to come up with a slogan and a picture. I thought I'd share our results with you. Heck, they even got me to pose for a picture. Hope you enjoy.

—*Paul Stroud, Teacher*

Send us a SASE to receive a signed 8x10 Greg Ford glossy. OK, not really. Seriously, don't send it.

➤ Tell it. We were none too happy to hear that news ourselves. Word is, EA and Microsoft couldn't agree to terms on the financial side—it's a shame that gamers are the ones who end up losing out, though. An EA spokesperson had this to say: "It is possible that the two companies will arrive at a mutually agreeable business model that will allow Electronic Arts to include online capability. At this time, there are no EA games in development that will support Xbox Live."

Greg Ford fan club starts...now

You know that letter that somebody sent about liking that guy that sent in personal info about himself [Letters, *EGM* #166], or whatever? And how you ran a picture of him that was kissed by Contributing Reviewer Greg Ford? Well, Greg Ford is a freaking hottie and he should be told so. You guys should have a monthly poster or pinup of him, so I could create a shrine in my room. He could just sit there and smile sweetly, or do, like, boy-band poses. You could interview him about what he's been up to that month, too. Well, I can dream, can't I? I'm officially his biggest fan, really; *I love him*! To be honest, while I respect all of your reviews, mostly I only read his. By the way, Bryan Intihar is cute, too, *very cute*. Shout out to those guys—they make me less sad about Greg Sewart's absence....

—*Demetria Smith*

The only way this letter would be more hilarious is if you spelled "hottie" as "hawttie."

Fat cats' fat tax

Have we truly become such a blame-anyone-but-ourselves society that we now have to have a fat tax? As I'm sure you know, a 1 percent tax hike has been proposed by New York State Assemblyman Felix Ortiz, which would apply to junk food, television commercials, and *videogames*. Mr. Ortiz

word on the street

DESCRIBE YOUR PERFECT FIGHTING GAME

I'd like to see a return to the genre's roots. In the case of 2D fighters, I'd like a greater emphasis on a player's strategic aptitude instead of the ability to crank out an endless combo. Multiple fighting styles (akin to the character Gen from *Street Fighter Alpha 2/3*) would be a plus. A guard-reversal system of some sort should be included, and a dash feature as seen in a multitude of *King of Fighters* titles...although rolls need to go. Who actually rolls around in a real fight, anyway?

—*Chris "Bam" Scantlebery*

Ultraviolent *Battle Royale*–themed goodness. Give a bunch of high-school kids their respective weapons from the [*Battle Royale*] book and also toss in the ability to steal their opponent's weapons midbattle. Do it in 2D, with 3D elements like *Project Justice* [Dreamcast] but without all the high-flying leaps and game-breaking infinites. Toss in a good defensive system with parrying and maybe even the option to cancel your combos, and I could easily play that for years to come.

—*Christopher Rubin*

A *Street Fighter* anthology. Every character from all *Street Fighters* in one game. There could be ratio and tag matches like in *Capcom vs. SNK*, and they could expand on the -isms of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* to give the game a little more depth. That, or a new *Darkstalkers* game.

—*Chuck "Chux" Forrester*

Combine the deep gameplay of *Soul Calibur*; the awards, trophies, and general mayhem of *Super Smash Bros. Melee*; and the ladies of *Dead or Alive*, and you've got the perfect fighter. Oh, and a soundtrack by Yasunori Mitsuda [*Chrono Trigger*, *Xenogears*, *Xenosaga*, etc.].

—*Nathan Butcher*

If you'd like to participate in Word on the Street, check our message boards at www.egmmag.com.

Drunken fans causing property damage: no longer a key selling point of *NCAA Football 2004*.

has decided these vices are the root causes of New York's obesity problem. Junk food and television commercials, whatever, but how can our society blame someone's laziness or weight problems on a form of entertainment? This is ridiculous.

Oh well, let me get back to eating my 10,000 calorie, fat-filled Jumbo Jack meal while watching commercials for the newest game about sitting on my ass.

—*Tom Merritt*

Crazed fan rampage

In his review of *NCAA Football 2004* in *EGM* #169 [page 118], reviewer Bryan Intihar states, "Fans roar louder as you head toward paydirt, and watching them tear down goalposts after a big win had me sprinting through the office..." While this was a much-ballyhooed new feature in the press for *NCAA Football 2004*, it has been confirmed that fans coming onto the field and tearing down the goalposts has been removed from the final version of the game. This bothers me, as I have been a subscriber to *EGM* for many years and was under the impression that *EGM* only reviewed final copies. Any clarification would be appreciated.

—*Alex Williams*

We were wondering about that, too. Here's what Wendy Spander, PR manager for EA Sports, had to say: "After we submitted reviewable code to *EGM*, both the NCAA and EA decided that it would be best to remove this animation from the game. Unfortunately, this decision was made after *EGM* had gone to print. We know that every college football and sports fan is going to have a great game experience with or without this one animation sequence."

That pulling-down-the-goalposts bit is the only difference between the version we reviewed and the game that's on sale now. Our review scores remain unchanged: 9.0, 9.5, 9.0.

"Tearing down the goalposts has been removed from the game."

Mos def

All that talk about the next next-gen consoles is great [*EGM* #168, page 34], but by the time they come out, we will have all switched to high-definition television sets. Will the new consoles have high-definition graphics, or will they still be the same format as today's games?

—*J.E. Bundy*

Hell yeah, they'll be high definition. PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube are all capable of high-definition graphics already—it's more a question of whether the games support improved resolutions and progressive scan. Many do, especially Xbox titles. But we could evangelize on this topic for hours; check page 44 for a thorough briefing on high definition.

Man in the mirror

For the past three days, my friend and I have been arguing over who would win in a battle: Sephiroth (*Final Fantasy VII*) or famous *Zelda* villain Ganon? I said Ganon would win because he has the Triforce of Power, and he said Sephiroth would win because he's an Ancient. Can you guys settle this?

—*Andre Lee*

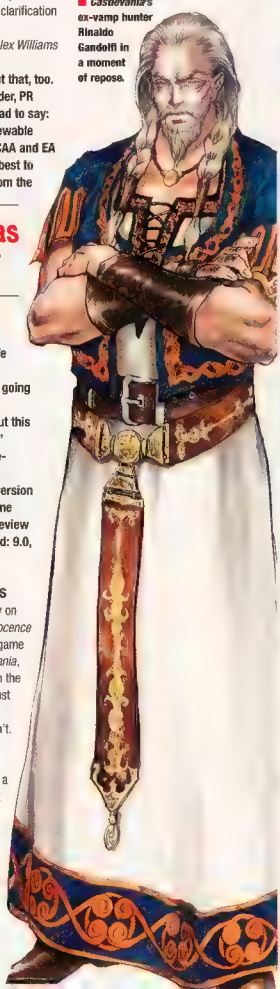
You've been arguing about this for three days? In this battle, you must look inward to find the true loser.

Lament of lameness

Having read the cover story on *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence* [*EGM* #168], I can say the game sounds great: new *Castlevania*, new character, new point in the timeline, new plot—well, just kidding on that last one, though I really wish I weren't.

I know [*Castlevania* Producer] Koji Igarashi says the story should take a backseat to the action, but couldn't Konami come up with something more original than that old "big meanie captures girlfriend/princess" cliché? I mean, come on. I've enjoyed almost every *Castlevania* since I played the original on the Nintendo Entertainment System, but reading this made me go, "Ho hum, not that again." And those are words that should never be connected with the *Castlevania* series. Someone really should let Konami (and many other game developers) know that it's been 20 years since Mario saved Pauline from Donkey Kong. This plot device had worn out its welcome long ago through extreme overuse, which, unfortunately, continues today. I know I can't be the only one sick of it.

—*Stacy Ranta*



Castlevania's ex-vamp hunter Rinaldo Gandolfi in a moment of repose.

THE UNDERDOGS

Scrappy start-ups take on the hardware heavy-weights

Betcha didn't know that PlayStation inventor Ken Kutaragi created his world-dominating game console in his parents' basement while still living at home. And did you know that Nintendo was begat in the back of a van by a guy with 10 bucks and a napkin sketch of a vaulting plumber?

Well, turns out none of that's true. But that hasn't stopped featherweight companies (and, admittedly, one behemoth corporation) from dreaming up eager schemes to enter the game-biz ring and swipe the championship belts from Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo. This *is* an 11 billion buck-a-year business we're talking about.

With that in mind, we size up four of the liveliest challengers, give them their time in the spotlight, and see if they have what it takes to survive 10 rounds in a business that can barely support the three current major consoles. After all, everyone has to start somewhere, right? Just ask Microsoft, which kicked off as a small group of geeks who had a thing for computers. (And that story really is true.)

Illustrations by eBoy

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PHANTOM

Buy games at home? How? The Phantom knows

Maybe it was the system's name, or that the company behind it was based in retiree-choked central Florida, or that a well-circulated e-mail claimed it was all a goof. But we had a tough time believing the Phantom game console was legit when it was announced earlier this year. Heck, we still kinda wonder if it's hoaxery. Nevertheless, Phantom maker Infinium Labs—which is expanding operations to St. Louis and San Francisco—is serious about this mystery machine. "This thing isn't a toy like other consoles," says Infinium Chief Operating Officer Robert Shambro. "It's made for 18- to 35-year-old high-end gamers looking for convenience—the ability to subscribe to, rent, and buy games right from their television sets."

Nabbing games in your jammies? Here's how it works: Starting early next year, gamers will purchase the Phantom console either from www.phantom.net or participating DSL and cable TV providers (the system won't be available in stores), hook it to their

■ $300 • Due Oct. 7, 2003

N-GAGE

Raid tombs, jam to tunes, and call your bitches

"N-Gage is a new breed of device," says Ilkka Raiskinen, senior vice president of entertainment and media for wireless giant Nokia, by far the mightiest challenger in this article. "There are already devices that are either multiplayer, online, or mobile. The N-Gage combines these things. It's a new segment we are building."

New segment? We wouldn't go that far. N-Gage is going after the same handheld market that Nintendo's Game Boy has owned for more than 10 years—and a gaming crowd that Sony's newly announced PSP portable will target next year. But N-Gage is also locking on to the burgeoning mobile-phone biz. Think of it as a Swiss Army phone, a device whose main attractions include gaming, MP3 playing, FM-radio listening, and—'cause it's a high-end cell phone, after all—calling people, web browsing, and text messaging. N-Gage's 1.38-inch-by-1.63-inch backlit color screen produces near-PS1-quality visuals, it uses Bluetooth wireless or online technology for

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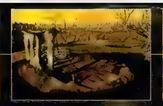
AFTER *the fall of the* DARK GOD,

the bloody war between Imperia and Nordagh was ended, but at a terrible price. Mankind had very nearly been destroyed. In the wake of this horror, the people of the world vowed never to wage war against each other again. In the uneasy peace that followed, the skills of bloodshed were largely confined to the arena. Schools of gladiators from strange lands hardened themselves in local leagues hoping to compete in the glorious tournaments of Imperia. This is the world that Valens and Ursula are born into. Valens, the son of a legendary gladiator, trying to grow out of his father's shadow.

Ursula, the daughter of a barbarian king, struggling to understand the strange and ancient power she seems to possess. This is the world of Gladius.™ An epic RPG that will take you to the far ends of the earth as you recruit, train and run a customized school of gladiators. Fight with hundreds of deadly weapons. Wield powerful magic. And master the dance of flesh and steel. Gladius.™ Your life begins and ends in the arena.

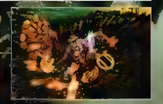
THE SOUTHERN EXPANSE

Not much is known about the sparkling cities of this dry and arid land across the sea. The Palace of Ibliis is known as the premier arena of this distant land. Built by a tyrant king who is said to have converted a wing of his palace into an arena to quench his thirst for bloodshed. There are rumors of dark magic, and many travelers have returned from voyages there with tales of men who summon lightning from the sky and bend it to their will.



THE GLORY OF IMPERIA

Schools of gladiators train all their lives hoping to compete in the brutal tournaments of Imperia. Home to the world's finest artists, architects and warriors, Imperia is the pinnacle of the civilization. Its reach extends from the Central Valley to the golden coast of the Aeonis Sea. The High Tournaments in the Arena at Caltha, which seats 30,000 spectators, are famed throughout the land. Only the best gladiators in the world are deemed worthy to fight here, and a gladiator may advance no higher without ascending to heaven.



THE WINDWARD STEPPES

The people of the Windward Steppes are largely nomadic—living in tented communities throughout their barren and seemingly endless plains. The Steppes are a wild and dangerous place. Though travelling there is not without its reward. Strange and powerful weapons can be purchased there, like flaming bows and the deadly Yatagan blades. And roving tribes of nomads bring with them a constant stop of fresh fighters to test in the arena.

THE WILDS OF NORDAGH

A dark land of mighty barbarians. During the Great War, the kings of Nordagh fought the mighty armies of Imperia to a standstill. A huge wall separates Imperia from this hard and rugged land of dark forests and imposing mountains. The barbarian lands have a deep and mysterious history of magic—from the Galdr witches who counsel the kings to warriors who wield strange powers. The arenas of Nordagh are as harsh as its people, like Mordare's Den, where warriors fight inside the bones of a long-dead dragon.

SWORDS

In the hands of a skilled warrior, the sword is as versatile as it is deadly. From the lightning-fast short swords of the Imperial Secutors to the massive two-handed blades of the Nordagh barbarians—many a gladiator has faced death time and time again with nothing but his sword and his wits.

HAMMERS

Pound your opponents into submission with these crushing brutes. Hammers are the largest and most powerful weapons in the arena. And while they may be too heavy and too slow to swing for some people's style, the smashing results are well worth the wait.

AXES

If you want to fell opponents like small trees, you want a two-handed axe. A single blow and victory is yours. While not nearly as agile as the sword, axes tend to carry more weight, allowing the wielder to deliver a much more powerful strike.

RANGED WEAPONS

The Gungnirs are so skilled with the javelin they've been known to pin their enemies' feet to the ground. And Imperial gladiators are learning the accuracy of the archers of the Steppes with their deaths. Beware the ranged weapons, for you might find yourself dead before you know the fight has begun.

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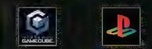
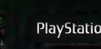
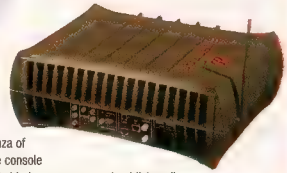




PlayStation 2



Infinium says the Phantom—available in silver and black—will pack a CPU three times zippier than the Xbox's and have four times the memory. Customers can upgrade its memory and hard drive when they order—hence, the price range.

boob tubes, and connect online via the system's broadband-only network port. Then they'll pay a subscription fee each month to access between five and seven games, which are downloaded on to the unit's built-in hard drive. "You can play those games all you want," says Shambro, who spent four years licensing movies and music for Net distribution before founding Infinium. "You're not charged by the minute or anything like that. At the end of the month, you can change those games out or keep them." Of course, you can pay additional fees to rent more games or buy them outright. Or you can fiddle with free demos to see what's even worth your dough.

Is it a contender? We're all for a system that delivers games right to our fat couch-potato asses—think of all the time we'll save not showering. But who cares about convenience if the content isn't good?

Although we figure the system's PC architecture will ensure a bonanza of computer games, we're not so sure console publishers will throw their support behind yet *another* console—especially one with a newfangled game-subscription model. But Shambro insists the games will come, even if Infinium has to pay publishers to port them over. "We're in talks with 250 developers and publishers," he says, "and there's a lot of incentive for them to bring games to our platform, because we cut out the retailers. There's no packaging, no distribution, no shelf space—the games go straight to the consumers."

Phantom games

Infinium will store all of Phantom's games—plus keep them patched—on servers scattered throughout the country. As far as what that content will be, expect a load of PC titles (including online games, kid-friendly stuff, and parlor fare like Checkers), as well as console titles ported to the Phantom. Shambro is even confident we'll see some exclusives. Though he isn't talking subscription prices yet, he says that the monthly fee will be "competitive and desirable." Rental prices will reflect the game—the more high-profile the title, the more it will cost to download.

Game screens aren't ready, but it's not too early to buy a Phantom thong. Zip to www.cafeshops.com/ilabs/101291 and shop.

Yeah, we're not sure what all these buttons are for, either. We think one of them alerts you that you've paid too much money for this phone.

multiplayer gaming, and brings a lineup of software (priced at $30-$40 each) from big-name publishers such as Activision, Sega, THQ, Ubi Soft, and Eidos. Beginning Oct. 7, you can find it at Best Buy, Circuit City, Electronics Boutique, Gamestop, Target, and many other stores.

Is it a contender? We'll admit that N-Gage sounds good on paper, but it's just not a well-designed games machine. The button layout is awkward, and switching games means removing the battery to access the cartridge slot. It's not even a well-designed phone, either. You talk and listen by holding the top side of the machine to your mouth and ear (picture gripping a GBA sideways beside your head). But more important, the N-Gage's initial library of games offers little bang for its highfalutin' buck. Paying 40 smackers for portable versions of last millennium's greatest console hits (see below) might sound exciting to some, but Game Boy Advance offers a more impressive library at a third of the price. ➤

N-Gage games

Nokia estimates that 20 games will be ready by the holiday season, but here are the three biggest guns in their arsenal...

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater
Become Tony Hawk or one of the other pros in this amalgamation of home *Hawks 1, 2,* and *3*. Plus, compete against players nationwide for high scores.

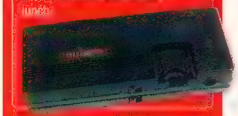
Tomb Raider
This Lara Croft adventure, based on the first PS1 game, includes three exclusive levels and limited online play (you'll try to beat players' time records).

Red Faction
Doom co-designer John Romero's Monkeystone Software created this original first-person shooter (based on THQ's franchise) just for N-Gage.

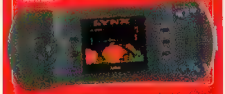
knockouts

FIVE SPUNKY SYSTEMS THAT COULDN'T GO THE DISTANCE

TurboGrafx-16 (1989-1993) — We loved this thing's slim game cards and nifty titles (*Devil's Crush*, Bat Video Pinball). Even, but Sega's Genesis and Nintendo's Super NES ate the Turbo's lunch.



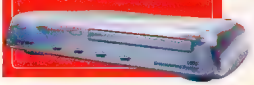
Atari Lynx (1990-1992) — Despite gee-whiz color visuals and effects no other system could top, this pricey portable couldn't compete with Nintendo's Game Boy colossus.



3DO (1993-1996) — The first "next generation" system with full-blown 3D capabilities came with a sucker-punch price: $700 at launch.

Neo•Geo Pocket Color (1998-2001) — SNK's pocket wonder sported sharper graphics than the Game Boy Color, plus twice the battery life, and nifty fighting and strategy games. Then SNK pulled the plug.

Indrema (2001) — This Linux-based game system promised upgradeability, TiVo-like recording functions, and a wealth of support from independent game makers (hence, cheaper games). It died in development.



ALLOWED USERS TO PIRATE GBA SOFTWARE. THE FULL DAMAGE AMOUNT WILL BE ANNOUNCED AT A LATER HEARING... >> CALL 1-900-MIX-ALOT AND KICK THEM NASTY THOUGHTS... >>

$200-$300 • Due late 2003

"HELIX"

The (Tap)wave of the future for on-the-go gaming?

Most of today's portable devices stick to one key function. MP3 players play tunes. GBA plays games. Personal Digital Assistants organize your life. But buying a separate machine for each of these applications will vaporize your piggy bank. The folks at Tapwave Inc.—a small California company made of ex-Palm employees—say save your money and wait for their Helix handheld, a PDA-like device that promises to deliver all the above-mentioned operations in one piece of hardware. Company co-founder Byron Connell says that Helix (the system's code name) will "address the needs of technology enthusiasts who are looking for the best in both fun and function." Besides running the 14,000 PalmOS applications available today, Helix owners can enjoy 2D and 3D videogames sporting visuals on par with PS1 titles (or even slightly better).

So how does this all-in-one handheld handle? We've seen and held a prototype, but Tapwave won't release any images beyond the concept sketch above. It's similar to the original GBA, but with a bigger screen, an analog stick instead of a digital pad, two additional action buttons on the right side, and, like the GBA, two shoulder triggers. It'll weigh six ounces, run off dual lithium batteries, and support a rumble function. Gaming on Helix won't be all about solo play, either; the device allows for wireless multiplayer fun with up to seven other users.

Is it a contender? Although this system's features are impressive, we're a little concerned that—with less than six months before the handheld is scheduled to hit stores—Tapwave hasn't decided on a final name and has announced only two games. It all has us doubting Tapwave's plan for a 2003 release. But the bigger question is whether Helix can succeed once Sony's PSP portable—which promises many of the same functions—arrives on the scene next year. "While I'm sure Sony will produce a solid product, they are also making some interesting technology trade-offs that a large segment of the market may not fully appreciate," says Connell. "For example, the [PSP's] 4.5-inch display combined with a spinning drive and the batteries to power it will definitely compromise pocketability and [durability]."

Helix games

Yes, you can play more than 1,400 PalmOS games on Helix, but these rinky-dink titles won't convince anyone to lay down $200-$300 for this system. It'll take more "real" games, such as Activision's *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* 4 and Atari's *Neverwinter Nights*—the two announced launch titles. (Helix games will come on ROM cards and cost $30 each.) The company hints that Midway is bringing popular sports brands like *NFL Blitz* to Helix, but beyond that, your guess is as good as ours.

The 3D RPG *Neverwinter Nights* (PC version shown) is getting downsized for the Helix.

$300 and up • Due February 2004

DISCOVER

Wanna play Halo and Vice City on the same console? DISCover how

Digital Interactive Systems Corp. (DISC) may sound more like the kind of company that specializes in Ham radios rather than game consoles. And, truth be told, this start-up isn't actually making a games machine. Instead, it's selling an idea—that gamers are ready to play PC titles on their televisions—and DISC has the means to make it happen. The company has created a streamlined operating system that makes installing off-the-shelf PC games a quick, no-fuss procedure. "You won't even have to worry about configuring the graphics for performance or patching the game with updates," says DISC President Avraham Dorfl. "The system will do it for you."

The actual console—called DISCover—that harnesses this quick-install wizardry will be built by a dozen or so hardware partners (DISC is inking deals with Hyundai Electronics, Gateway, and Apex). The unit will be available at different performance and price levels, depending on who's making it. An entry-level model will cost about $300, while pricier units will pack a faster processor and a mightier graphics chip.

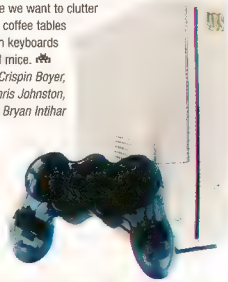
Gamers who buy the system (the first models should be available at Best Buy early next year) need to hook it online via its broadband port or dial-up modem. At night, the DISCover will call in to DISC's servers and download special scripts that tell it how to instantly install, update, and configure commercial PC games. All that owners need to do, in theory, is buy a PC game, pop it in the machine, and play.

Is it a contender? Multiple system models? Downloadable scripts? Sounds like a recipe for complications. But DISC assures us the console will deliver no-pain PC-game installations. That just leaves the big question: Do people even want to play PC games in their living rooms? The titles we tried looked fine on a television (via an S-video connection), but we're not sure we want to clutter our coffee tables with keyboards and mice.

—Crispin Boyer, Chris Johnston, & Bryan Intihar

DISCover games

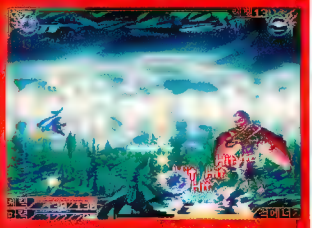
The plan is for DISCover to play every PC title, giving it a library of thousands of games—including *Halo* and *Vice City* for PC.



All the DISCover units will contain standard PC guts and USB ports so that owners can connect whatever peripherals strike their fancy.

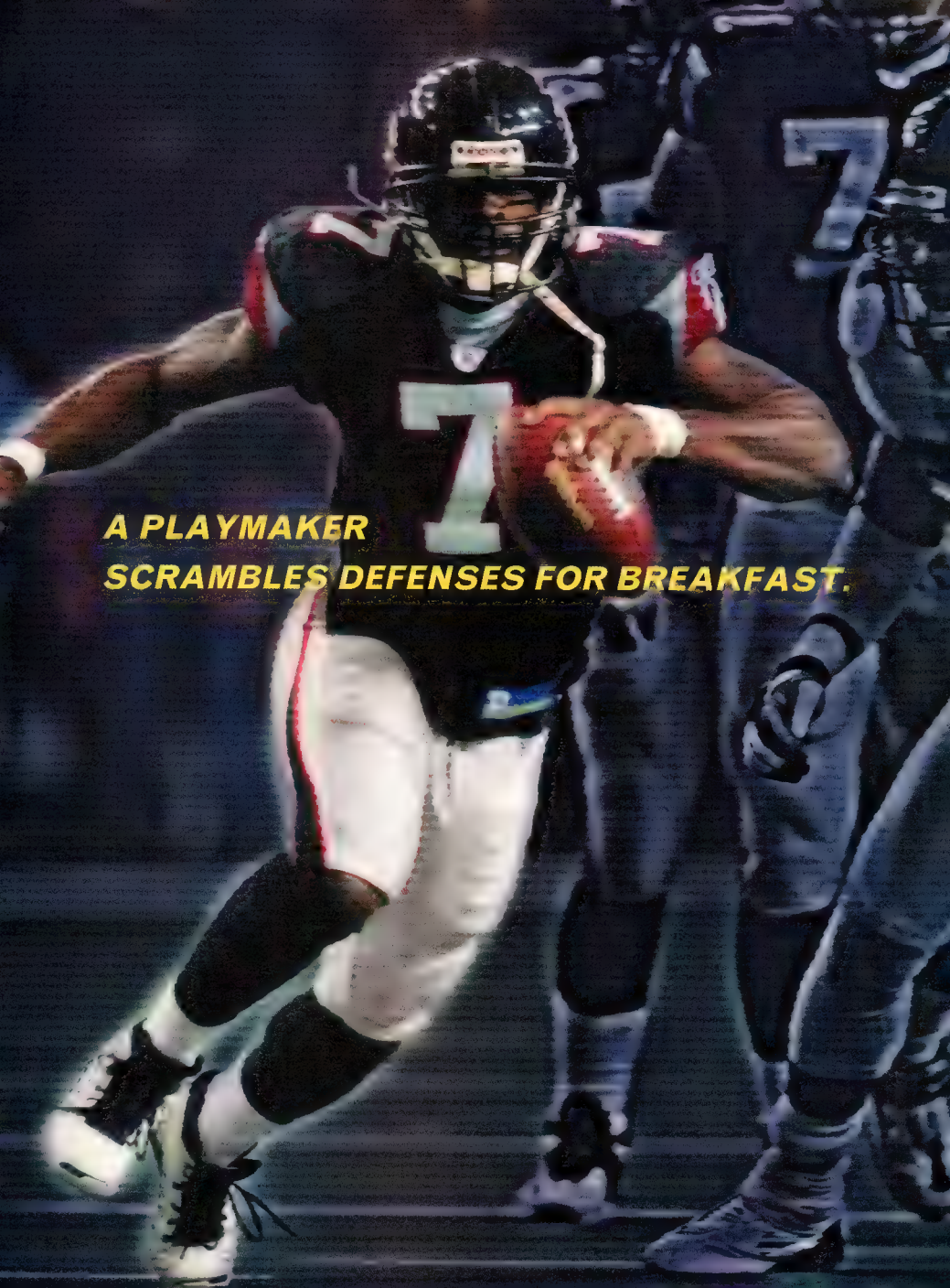
THE OUTSIDER: MEET THE GP32, THE KEWL KIDS' NERDY NEW TOY

Hardly a contender in the handheld wars (for starters, it's available only in Korea), the Game Park GP32 is nevertheless becoming an underground sensation among import-savvy gaming hipsters—online import store Lik-Sang has sold more than 4,000 of these things. The big deal isn't that the system packs a heftier tech punch—including a larger (though not backlit) screen, wireless networking capabilities, crisper graphics, and slicker sound—than Nintendo's GBA. Rather, people are going gaga over what the GP32 lets them do. A USB interface links the handheld to your PC, so you can transfer and listen to MP3 audio files or watch video clips. And you copyright-law-flaunttin' types can download emulators and games for just about every classic console, including coin-ops and home-brew titles (the system has spawned a massive amateur-coding community). It's all stored on the upgradeable Smart Media Cards you slip in the unit. The GP32 costs $160 at www.liksang.com—or get a special backlit model for 70 bucks more.



Few importers buy the GP32 for its obscure games, like *Wizard Slayer* (right). Tech-savvy gamers want it for its bag of nifty tricks and home-brew scene.

>> A SPECIAL-EDITION, TWO-TONE RED-AND-BLACK GBA SP WILL ACCOMPANY THE RELEASE OF KONAMI'S PORTABLE LIGHT-SENSING RPG *BOKTAI* IN JAPAN (AND ONLY IN JAPAN).... >>


A PLAYMAKER
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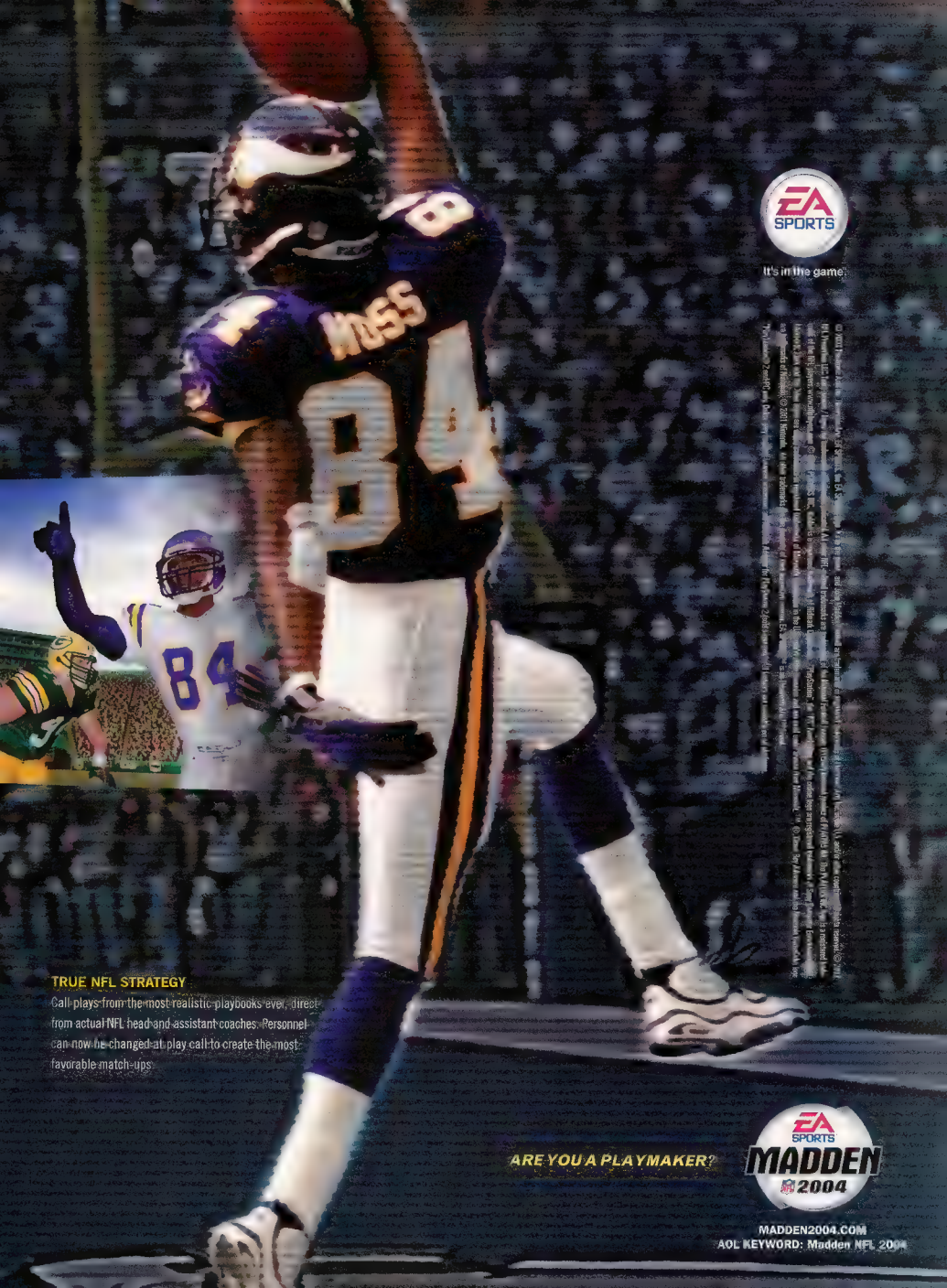
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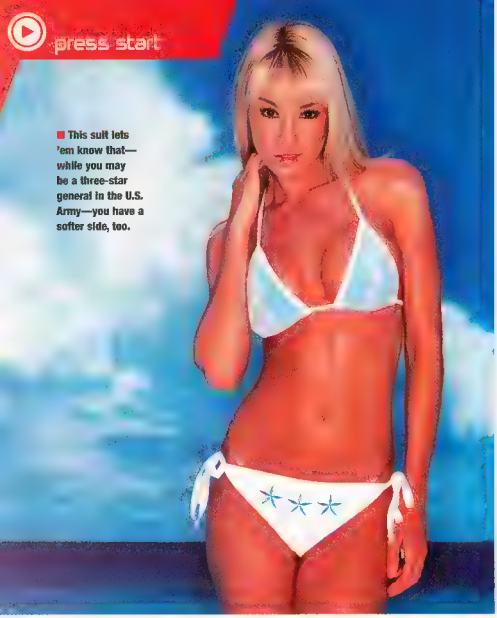

This suit lets 'em know that—while you may be a three-star general in the U.S. Army—you have a softer side, too.

SEX FOR SALE

Well, Dead or Alive bikinis, anyway

Guys, we know you secretly wish your girlfriend or wife were more like the battling beauties of Tecmo's *Dead or Alive* (minus the kicks and punches). Well, now you can get her halfway there by buying your special lady a real-life version of one (or all, if your wallet's feeling limber) of your favorite bikinis from Xbox babe-ogling simulator *Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. You'll find the slinky beachwear you see here (girls not included) on sale at Tecmo's online store at http://tecmogames.com/store/bikinis.asp. The catch is that they'll set you back $150 *each*. Don't see your favorite suit here? Just wait—Tecmo plans to add more designs straight out of the game in the coming months.

If you ask nice, maybe you can convince your woman to wear these around the house, too.

GRUDGE MATCH

Which high-budget disappointment is "The One"?

MATRIX RELOADED	VS.	ENTER THE MATRIX

Unfortunately, no one can be told what this month's Grudge Match is. You'll just have to see for yourself. But don't worry...it's right here. So pop a Tylenol, Mike and Ike, Flintstones chewable vitamin—any little red pill—and prepare to enter the Matrix-off! (Warning: spoilers ahead.)

	MATRIX RELOADED	ENTER THE MATRIX
ADMISSION PRICE:	$5.50 matinee, $2.50 Goobers to contemplate in between fight scenes. **Advantage: *Reloaded***	$4.50 rental, $4.50 rebound rental of superior game
NEAT TRICKS:	Masterful manipulation of the Matrix allows twin limey brothers to pass through walls. **Advantage: *Reloaded***	Poor programming of *The Matrix* allows everyone to get stuck in walls.
BAD GUYS:	Agent Smith clones himself hundreds of times and finds inefficient ways to fight Neo, such as punching and scowling. **Advantage: *Reloaded***	Security guards as far as the eye can see. These guys aren't tough in real life—are we expected to be afraid of them in a fantasy world?
"ACTING":	Mellow, emotionless Zionites all appear to have shared a huge virtual blunt. **Advantage: *Reloaded***	Keanu Reeves has recorded a special message for you if you can "hack the Matrix." It's, like, so worth hacking for.
LIKELY TO RECEIVE AWARD FOR:	Animating an aging Laurence Fishburne in ways we've all dreamed about but never thought physically possible. **Advantage: *Reloaded***	Showing up.

LAST MAN STANDING: *The Matrix Reloaded*

It's a sweep for *The Matrix Reloaded* in this battle of the bilge. Don't feel too bad, *Enter the Matrix*—plenty of suckers are still buying you!

NEWS BITS: SHORTER AND CHEAPER THAN THE NEW HARRY POTTER BOOK

Ride The License

Rockers Metallica have signed a deal with Vivendi Universal to be featured in a car combat game, due for all major platforms by early 2005. The as-yet-untitled game is described as "*Road Warrior* meets Metallica." Sounds, uh, original? Let's just hope it's not another *KISS: Psycho Circus*.

SP Sees Red, Black

Haven't bought a Game Boy Advance SP because the current colors don't match your outfit? Well, starting September 8, you'll have two more to choose from—onyx (that's black) and flame (red). Still not interested? Teal, periwinkle, and sea-foam colors are only a few months away. Probably.

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NINTENDO CHANGES

We chat with the creator of Mario about Nintendo's mistakes, Sony's handheld system, and why GTA3 is good for the industry

These are tough times for GameCube. Disappointing sales of the biggest Cube titles and the system's sagging reputation among gamers are just two of the many "challenges" (read: problems) Nintendo President Satoru Iwata recently admitted his company faces this year. "But," Iwata was quick to add, "this is not a matter of understanding [problems], it's a matter of action. And at Nintendo, we are already acting." To find out how, we went straight to Shigeru Miyamoto, aka The Man. (As the creator of *Mario, Zelda, Donkey Kong*, and about every other major Nintendo franchise, he's earned the title.)

EGM: How and why is Nintendo changing? What mistakes have you been making?

Shigeru Miyamoto: There was a time when people would buy a hardware system for **one big title**, but we've found that in this generation [of consoles], that's simply not the case. Which is why we're now really focusing on the idea of having a broad line-up—a broader lineup with a broader appeal for a wider audience. But you can't simply add people and expect to make the same high-quality titles that we've always produced. That is why we've been gradually increasing in size internally [at Nintendo world headquarters] in Kyoto—so we can train people and bring them up to the level of quality that we expect.

For example, Nintendo's N64 system sold, to a large extent, solely on the strength of *Super Mario 64*.

Perhaps a reference to Microsoft buying ex-Nintendo developer Rare (currently working on several projects, including *Perfect Dark Zero* with the revamped Ms. Joanna Dark here)?

EGM: And the new development office Nintendo is starting in Tokyo is part of that?

SM: Yes. And that's not simply hiring a bunch of programmers and developers; we're actually taking a strong group of people in Kyoto who've been taught the Nintendo way of development, and they're going to be the core of [the Tokyo team]. So the idea is not just building resources, but building resources that maintain the Nintendo level of quality. That's why we don't go into this idea of just **buying up developers** and getting all this development power to pump titles out. We look more at finding individuals we think are capable of producing creative titles, and supporting them and giving them the resources they need.

Like Mario World Developer Nintendo

Smaller, more **independent developers** in Japan—we'll support them and give them resources to bring out more original styles of gameplay.

EGM: And you're also using bigger Japanese developers, such as Sega, Capcom, and Namco.

SM: That's also why, with some of the larger developers, we find people we can entrust our franchise characters to. Namco's now making a *Star Fox* game. Mr. Nagoshi [head of the Sega development studio Amusement Vision] is working on *F-Zero*. And actually, *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami at Capcom came to us and said he wanted to work on Nintendo titles. *Sonic* creator Yuji Naka has done the same. So really, we're focusing on this idea of finding creative and talented designers to put together a strong lineup for the GameCube.

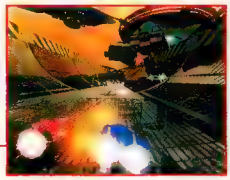
EGM: What do you think of Sony's announcement of a PlayStation Portable (PSP) coming next year?

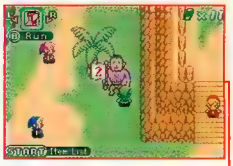
SM: What surprised me about the announcement was that with no model or anything to show, they just announced a long list of specs. And for a company as big as Sony to do something like that—I thought that was very surprising. For me the biggest question is, "Why did they do that?" It makes me wonder if there's not some kind of problem or something. [Laughs]

This isn't the first time a major player has announced a handheld; a lot of people have had designs on the handheld market, some of them very big—from Sega to **SNK** to Bandai, a number of companies have put out handhelds. I don't know how many of those we all remember [laughs], but obviously Game Boy has lasted and continues to do well—the SP is doing very well. We're going to focus on the software, like we've always done, and use that to build the market. Connectivity is another strength we have. You know, I wonder if Sony's not going to try to do something similar and suddenly start talking about connectivity themselves.

Despite a strong cult following, SNK's Neo-Geo Pocket Color failed to catch on with the mainstream.

EGM: Speaking of connectivity, it's a major theme for your company this year. Why does Nintendo care so much about hooking up your GBA with your GameCube?





SM: What I wanted was to look at a slightly different technological advance in gaming than what we've seen with standard hardware advancements. So what I'm looking at with connectivity is not only what it can bring to gameplay, but also how it can affect future enhancements to hardware. A lot of people are saying that online is the future of gaming, but I actually think there are a lot of different things that could be the future.

If you look closely at the connectivity games, *Tetra's Trackers*, for the most part, you play on your **GBA screen**. Occasionally, you look up at the GameCube screen to get **the bigger picture**, and you compete against one another. *Four Swords* is a game in which you're all playing together on the **TV screen**, and sometimes you can go into **a secret cave** or a house and find secrets on your GBA screen. And then *Pac-Man* is

THE INFAMOUS CD-BY-MAIL COMPANY COLUMBIA HOUSE HAS JOINED FORCES WITH GAME PUBLISHER MAJESCO TO START A VIDEOGAME CLUB. IF YOU DON'T SEND BACK THAT FORM,

DIRECTION

still another style of game, where you have one player who's completely playing as Pac-Man on the GBA and can see everything, and the other three players are chasing after him [as enemy ghosts], playing on the TV screen.

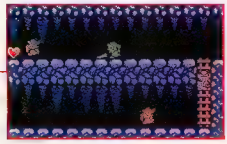
So what I really see connectivity offering is one basic system of connecting a GameCube to a Game Boy Advance, and yet by doing that, you're able to create all these new styles of games. On top of that, you can take something like an old game that was done in the past and add this connectivity feature to it and all of a sudden, it's got a whole new appeal and a whole new style of fun.

EGM: Do you see connectivity games like *Tetra's Trackers* and *Four Swords* as full standalone games, as part of a collection, or for lower prices?
SM: Because the GameCube uses disc media, it opens up a lot of options for us in terms of pricing and how we're going to offer these games. We're still talking to Namco about how to handle *Pac-Man*, but I think we have a lot of options open to us.

Scan e-Reader cards to insert new items—like that big-ass onion—into *Mario Advance 4*.

[At a later conference, Miyamoto offered the hypothetical example of offering the GBA-GC *Pac-Man* as an extra game on a *Pac-Man Collection* compilation disc.]

EGM: *Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3* for GBA uses special cards and the e-Reader peripheral to add new items to the game itself. How will that work, since the e-Reader takes up the GBA cartridge slot?
SM: Right now it's a little bit complicated, because you need both a GBA with the game and a GBA with the e-Reader, plus a cable to connect them. [In a lower voice, to translator in Japanese] *Have we announced anything about* Pokémon *yet*?
Translator: [In Japanese] *No, we haven't.* [Looks at interviewer] *But he can understand some Japanese....* [Everyone laughs]
SM: We'll be talking about a *Pokémon*-related thing, too, sometime in the near future.



EGM: At a recent press conference, Nintendo joked, "Mario will never start shooting hookers." But we're curious: What do you think about *Grand Theft Auto III*, both as a game and in terms of its effect on the gaming industry as a whole?
SM: I think there are some morality issues with *GTA* that people are looking at, but going beyond that, and looking more specifically at the game design itself, it gives you a lot of freedom. It gives the player a lot of choices about what they do, and I think—evaluating the gameplay side of it—the game has been put together very well. As an interactive medium, I think it's very important that we're careful with the use of things like violence in videogames. But on the other side, in a time when people are spending so much time focusing on graphics and cinematics, *GTA* is a game that really doesn't have highly polished graphics or really incredible cinemas. Yet it's a game that, based on the very nature of its gameplay, has sold very well. In that respect, it's a pretty good thing for the industry. ➤

After his brief stint in the limelight with *Luigi's Mansion*, Luigi finds himself back at his old job as Mario's full-time bitch in the GBA RPG *Mario and Luigi*, coming this winter.

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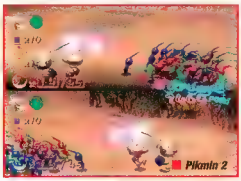
■ If you think that Link, with all the millions he has earned as the star of the best-selling *Zelda* series, wouldn't get excited about finding five rupees anymore, well then you just don't know Link.

"[The next GameCube *Zelda* title] will not have a realistic Link. At least, not the *next* one...."

—Zelda creator Shigeru Miyamoto



■ *Pikmin 2*

■ *Geist*

■ *Mario and Luigi*

■ *Mario and Donkey Kong*

➤ **EGM: We have a lot more to ask you about and only a little time, so how about a lightning round—I'll say a bunch of upcoming game names and you say something about them in 20 words or less. Sound good? Starting...now.**

SM: Well, there's a lot I don't know ab—

EGM: The next GameCube *Zelda*...

SM: ...will not have a realistic Link. At least, not the *next* one....

EGM: *Pikmin 2*...

SM: ...I think it's going to be a very fun game that brings together all the best parts of the original *Pikmin*.

EGM: *Geist*...

SM: ...I think [developer n-Space] is a very talented team.

EGM: *Mario and Luigi* [GBA]...

SM: ...It's a very Nintendo-esque action-RPG.

EGM: *Mario and Donkey Kong* [GBA]...

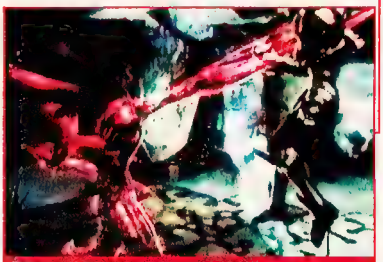
SM: ...It's a remake [of *Donkey Kong* for Game Boy], but I think it's a very playable, very easy pick-up-and-play game.

EGM: *Metroid Prime 2*...

SM: ...You'll definitely be playing it next year.

EGM: *100 Marios* [code name for the next Mario platformer]...

SM: ...If I don't show something of it at the next E3 [game industry convention in May], I'll feel like I haven't fulfilled my responsibilities. [Laughs] —*Mark MacDonald*



■ Nintendo still hasn't released any screens for *Metroid Prime 2*, so for now, all we have is this grainy pic from a short video presentation. (That blob on the right is Samus, being held up by some kind of mean alien.)

FILMING ON A BIG-SCREEN VERSION OF SURVIVAL-HORROR CLASSIC *ALONE IN THE DARK* BEGAN IN JULY 2003....

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Nothing unites a group of strangers like pure contempt for the guy

Microsoft game studios

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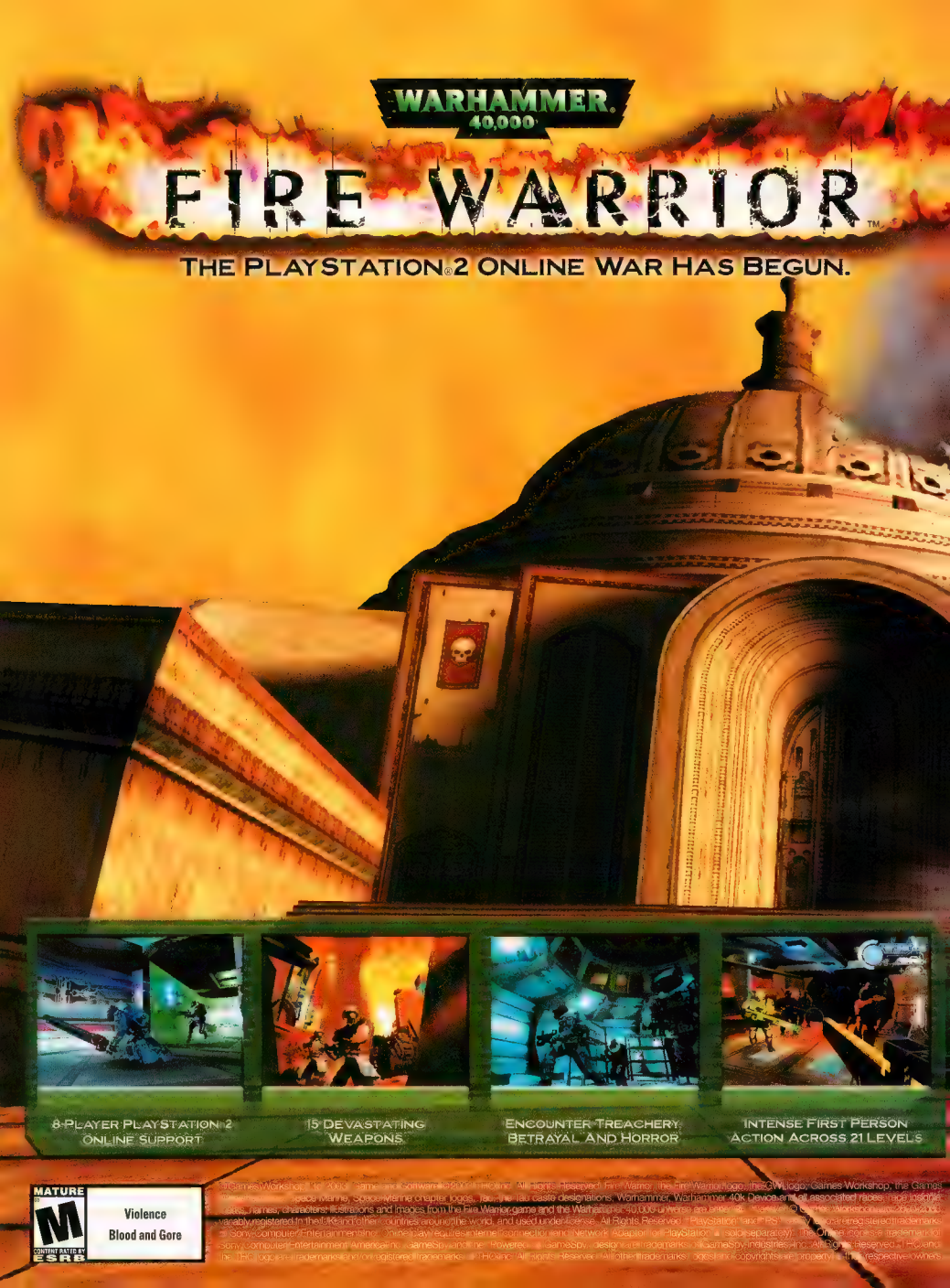
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SCREEN NAME: THE EXTIRWINATOR
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SPECS: HUSBAND. FATHER OF FOUR
WEAPON OF CHOICE:
PLASMA GUN
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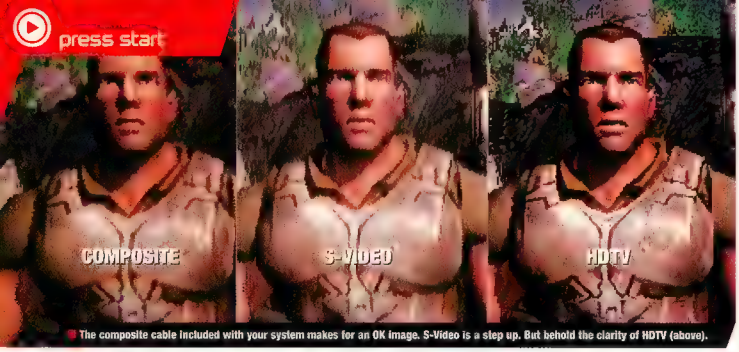


The composite cable included with your system makes for an OK image. S-Video is a step up. But behold the clarity of HDTV (above).

INSTANT EXPERT: HDTV GAMING

Your 60-second guide to must-game TV

The long-planned broadcast transition from regular TV signals to supercrisp HDTV has become a debacle, but who wants to see *American Juniors* in pimple-amplifying high definition anyway? Put that TV tech to proper use and start gaming in beautiful super-resolution. Here's how....

Get the hook-up

You have several ways of hooking a game system to a television (see the shots above), but only one cable—called **component**—enables high-definition visuals (and only if you have a progressive scan–capable television, but we'll get to that in a sec). System-specific component cables will run you $30-$60.

Interlaced or progressive?

Today's televisions can display visuals in four modes: 480i, 480p, 780p, and 1080i. The number refers to the lines of vertical resolution (the higher the number, the crisper the picture), and the letter denotes whether it's interlaced or progressive. An **interlaced** display alternates between drawing the odd and even lines of an image. Your brain fills in the gaps, but it just doesn't look as crisp as a **progressive-scan** screen, which draws the whole image in one go. Conventional televisions offer only a 480i display. If you want higher resolutions and progressive-scan support, you need to trade up to an HDTV.

Pelican's System Selector Pro ($100, due in August) hooks up eight consoles to your HDTV, plus any optical (digital stereo) and Ethernet cables that go with them.

HDTV or HD-ready?

HDTVs support 480p and the sharper 1080i mode (pricier models offer 720p, while cheaper sets convert 720p to the slightly flickery 1080i). So-called HD-ready sets or HD monitors support the same modes—they just won't display high-definition TV programming without a separate $500 HDTV tuner.

Reality TV: At $1,000, Samsung's 32-inch DynaFlat HDTV is the perfect entry-level set.

Putting it all together

Once you've nabbed an HDTV and component cables for your console, all you need is a game that supports high-definition display modes. Nearly all Xbox games are 480p-compatible (some even support 720p and 1080i). Most GameCube titles switch to 480p if you hold the B button when you turn on the system. A few PlayStation 2 titles run in progressive scan, and a newly released PS2 model plays DVD flicks in hi-def, too. Check the back of your game box or head to www.hdtvpub.com/games to see which games support what on all three systems. The progressive scan–compatible *SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALs* (PS2), *Panzer Dragoon Orta* (Xbox), and *Metroid Prime* (GameCube) are great games to show off your new HDTV and make pals jealous.

—*Casey Loe*

BY THE NUMBERS

Where has all the money gone?

$130 Million Domestic box-office earnings of first *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* movie

$700 Million Worldwide earnings of *Tomb Raider* videogame series

$0 Total royalties earned from both by *Tomb Raider* creator Toby Gard

$10 Billion Total American videogame spending in 2002

$60 Billion Total American credit card debt in 2002

$30 Million Cost to develop Atari's *Enter the Matrix*, 2003

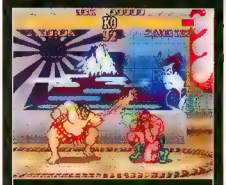
$20 Million Purchase price of entire Atari Corp. in 1976

OLD SCHOOL

10 years ago in EGM

On the Cover: Street Fighter II Turbo vs. Mortal Kombat

Two games that have appeared on more *EGM* covers than any other single title shared the honor 10 years ago. In case you were wondering, *SF2 Turbo* nabbed higher review scores than *Kombat*.



Game of the Month: *Street Fighter II Turbo* (SNES)

Today, *Street Fighter* is a ghost of its former self. But our Review Crew thought *Turbo* was fan-friggin-tastic (before *SF2* updates popped up weekly). It beat out Nintendo's *Super Mario All-Stars* collection by one point for Game of the Month.

Move Over, Madden

Ten years ago, Electronic Arts dabbled with a little series of over-the-top sports games for Sega's Genesis, dubbed *Mutant League* in both hockey and football flavors. We demand remakes!

Sega reveals Saturn

Also in this issue, then Sega frontman Tom Kalinske let slip that Sega was working on a 32-bit CD-based machine called Saturn (which would be released two years later). The report indicated Saturn would be backward-compatible with the company's Genesis software library (a feature that was later scrapped).

LODGENET—WHICH INSTALLED N64 SYSTEMS AND GAMES IN 875,000 HOTEL ROOMS NATIONWIDE—IS UPGRADING TO GAMECUBES. HMM...SOFTCORE PORN OR GAMING?....

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AFTERTHOUGHTS: BRUTE FORCE

The squad behind the Xbox squad-shooter sounds off about cloned enemies and dino-god passwords

For the sequel: The developers toyed with giving you squad vehicles, but "we decided that was something *Halo* does well and wanted to focus on other things," says Producer Erin Roberts. Most likely, vehicles and "Xbox Live support will go into the next game," he says.

So you've beaten *Brute Force* on the Brutal difficulty with three gung-ho buddies, but have you found all the cowboy hats? Negative? Then you better stand at attention, soldier, as developer Digital Anvil's Erin Roberts (producer) and Tim Fields (lead designer) deliver all the other intel you're missing about this summer's biggest Xbox game.

EGM: We noticed you thank some guys from *Halo*-developer Bungie in *Brute Force*'s credits. How were they involved in the game?

Erin Roberts: They helped in a couple of ways. One was on our control methodology. We really liked the way the controls worked in *Halo*. A lot of people know these controls well, so why bother coming up with a new scheme for this game? They also helped with combat targeting. *Halo* has a really nice use of the reticule. Basically, when the reticule goes over an enemy, there's a sort of magnetism and friction. It slows down slightly and tries to stay with the enemy. It makes players feel like they're better at shooting and killing the bad guys.

EGM: Speaking of bad guys, one of our big gripes is that enemies—as well as environments—got really repetitive. Two levels even have a near-identical boss. What's up with that?

ER: It all comes down to how much we could do with the time we had. To build each one of these characters, give it unique animations and so forth, obviously takes a lot of time. There are actually 24 unique characters in the game, and basically, that's all we could fit in with the time we had. Plus we're dealing with finite memory on the Xbox, so there are only so many sets of characters and their animation data that we can fit in at one time. That limits each mission to a certain set of characters.

EGM: What's the difference between the Hard and Brutal difficulties?

Tim Fields: Enemies live longer on the Brutal level. They're more accurate. They can take more damage. They won't break and run as often when they're getting fired upon. And since they survive longer, they have more time to do more sophisticated things like work together as squads and so forth.

There's a very intricate A.I. system that you'll never really see on the easier difficulties, because the bad guys don't last long enough to do the different things that they do. In the easy levels, it's easier to use just one guy [from your squad] and shoot a lot of people. But when you play on Hard and Brutal, you'll see how important and essential it is to use the entire squad properly.

EGM: Any tips for using the squad to survive the Brutal difficulty?

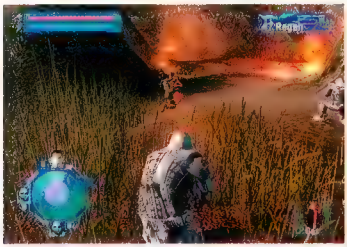
TF: You want to make sure all four of your characters can concentrate their fire on a particular enemy whenever possible. The best way to do this is to first use Hawk to go invisible and scout out the group you are about to ambush. *You* should always be ambushing *them*. Then fall back, maybe drop a few mines along the way, and think about where you want the fight to take place. Make sure each squadmate is using a weapon with the most appropriate range and area-of-effect. Position each of your squadmates in [such] a way that they are going to have a clean shot at the [ambush] area, that they won't fire too early, that there aren't any obstacles in the way, that no squadmate will be hurt by [concussion] damage, etc. Then coax the enemy into the ambush you've set up and watch the combined firepower of your squad cut them to shreds. If you use variations on this tactic, you can get a perfect score on every mission, even on Brutal difficulty.

EGM: Any secrets we should look for? C'mon—spill 'em.

TF: There's a cowboy hat hidden on each level. All I'll say is [that] they make you a lot more effective and more like John Wayne. You have to beat the game on Brutal before you go find those hats. A player who's going through slowly and methodically will find them. Another thing: If you listen to the Ferals, and if you think about the names of the Feral gods, those can be used to unlock secrets.

ER: They're like a password. Your readers will have to work out how to use them.

—*Crispin Boyer*



Want an edge in deathmatch? Pick the Confed Marine. "I'm willing to bet he can beat almost anybody," says Lead Designer Tim Fields. Oh, and crouching will recharge your special-power meter four times faster.

Yeehaw: Beat the game on Brutal before you hunt for these hats.

Liven things up

By the time you finally get tired of *Brute Force*, Digital Anvil will bring in reinforcements in the form of cool extras you can download via Microsoft's Xbox Live online service. The team is readying one new campaign mission, plus a deathmatch level and a squad-deathmatch level—all of which will be available by the end of the summer. "The squad-deathmatch level is my favorite," says Lead Designer Tim Fields, "because [success] is all about the controllable turrets."

>> HUDSON IS CURRENTLY BETA TESTING AN ONLINE VERSION OF ITS POPULAR MULTIPLAYER GAME *BOMBERMAN* (PS2) IN JAPAN; FINGERS CROSSED FOR A U.S. RELEASE SOON... >>

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Fat Joe in the Mojito

REAL ARMY MEN

Full Spectrum Warrior takes your finger off the trigger

Why did Alpha team cross the road? So Bravo could get to the other side.

Judging from the title of THQ's new military-action/strategy game (due for Xbox in early 2004), we half expected rainbow-spouting rifles and piñata grenades filled with tasty candy. Turns out "full spectrum warrior" is Army jargon for a soldier equipped to handle a wide variety of special ops. Go figure. But if the thought of yet another squad-based first-person shooter has you rolling your eyes, there are two things you should know. One, this ain't no ordinary trigger-happy blast-em-up. *Full Spectrum Warrior* was originally commissioned by the U.S. Army as a training program, and it remains an incredibly deep simulation of real-world military tactics. Two, it's neither first-person nor a shooter. While other games put you behind the soldier's scope, *Warrior* makes you the master behind the mayhem.

As the field commander of a nine-man squad divided into two teams, you handle the tactics while your men handle the fireworks. Order Alpha team to move in near a building's corner, and they take cover behind it, arranging themselves by the book with the team leader on lookout for hostile forces. Order them to cover an enemy-held building, and they position themselves to give each soldier a clear line of fire. (If you're the detail-oriented type, you can even have the team's rifleman watch the roof for snipers.) With Alpha in position, order Bravo team to advance toward the structure and investigate. If enemies show themselves while Bravo is on the move, Alpha will open fire. Tactics like these are the nuts and bolts that hold any mission together, whether it's eliminating a warlord or searching for contraband weapons in any of the game's urban Middle Eastern battlegrounds.

To transform the Army's original training simulator into a game, THQ and developer Pandemic (*Army Men: RTS*) plan to strengthen the story and ease up just a tad on the ultrarealism—such as speeding up reloading and allowing your troops to carry more than the standard ammo load. Players will also get added feedback on exactly what their soldiers should be doing. (The original simulation was designed for Army sergeants with several years of military experience.) But don't worry, the underlying tactics won't be dumbed down. For the truly hardcore, they may even include the original Army simulation along with the game.

—*Paul Byrnes*

If your troops are attacked out in the open, they automatically drop and return fire.

first looks at other games with guns

ROGUE OPS
PS2, Xbox, GC • Kemco • November 2003 — As ex-Green Beret Nikki Connors, you hunt down terrorists using stealth (you can even pickpocket foes), brains, and guns in this crossbreed experiment between *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid*.

MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM
Xbox • Sierra • Early 2004 — Expect clever artificial intelligence from both friends and foes in this period first-person shooter. Play through the entire campaign cooperatively, splitscreen or via Xbox Live. Another co-op game on Live! Huzzah!

KILL.SWITCH
PS2, Xbox • Namco • October 2003 — This third-person shooter features an intriguing system for returning fire from cover. So, wait—you mean we can shoot the bad guys but they can't shoot us? Brilliant!

>> PIXAR'S NEXT MOVIE, THE SUPERHERO-FAMILY TALE *THE INCREDIBLES*, IS DUE IN NOVEMBER 2004. THQ'S WORKING ON A GAME FOR MULTIPLATFORM SIMULTANEOUS RELEASE....

Out Of Myth
Comes Mayhem
Ancient Japanese monsters and
nightmares explode into the 21st century with
Otogi/Myth of Demons for the Xbox™ video game
system from Microsoft. Triumph over [illegible] in [illegible] and
celestial islands in the sky — deformable, destructible environments
that allow you to destroy everything that surrounds you.
Otogi for the Xbox. Story based on Japanese mythology.
Demons based on Japanese nightmares.
TEEN
T
Fantasy Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
XBOX
ONLY ON XBOX
Otogi
Myth of Demons
SEGA
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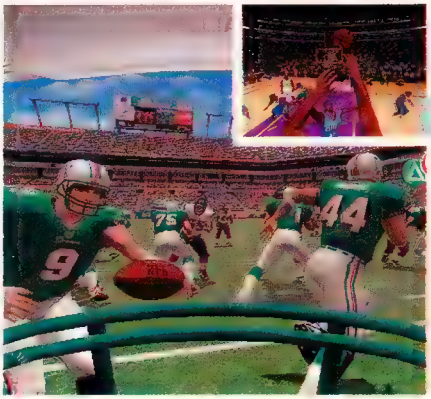
SEGA SPORTS A NEW LOOK

ESPN videogames try to tackle EA Sports

Even Sega will admit it—the company took one on the chin when it came to the sales of its sports games lineup last year. Despite having spent millions of dollars promoting its *2K3* series (*NFL*, *NBA*, *NHL*, etc.), stellar review scores, and the acquisition of the high-profile ESPN license, the company couldn't stop the EA Sports steamroller from flattening them saleswise in 2002.

But Sega isn't ready to throw in the proverbial towel just yet. Instead, the company has retooled its brand for this year's sports titles, ditching the "*2K*" label in favor of the "*ESPN*" moniker and further integrating the all-sports cable network's telecast style. (That includes adding ESPN talent like Chris Berman to provide commentary and more subtle elements such as the broadcast channel's picture-in-picture replays, score ticker, and theme music.)

If that weren't enough, developer Visual Concepts (Sega's sports studio) has a secret weapon in this year's games: a new, first-person gameplay perspective (think Helmet Cam). Gimmick or breakthrough gameplay feature, destined to be imitated by the competition? VC President Greg Thomas assures us it's the latter. "We have devoted a lot of time, resources, and R&D to making sure that [the first-person mode] isn't something that people will look at for a few seconds," he says. "Once players get to experience it, we believe they'll look at sports videogames from a totally different view."



■ ***ESPN NFL Football* (above) will include the new first-person mode this year for sure, but Sega hasn't decided yet if it'll appear in its other games, like *ESPN NBA Basketball* (inset).**

Is EA worried? Not really. Todd Sitrin, director of marketing at EA Tiburon (maker of the *Madden* games), doesn't share Thomas' confidence when it comes to first-person sports gaming. "[It's] been tried before—most gamers found it difficult in single-player and impossible in multiplayer," he says. "But we wish them the best."

So who's right? Well, we have our opinion (see our football review roundup on page 124), but ultimately, this contest will be decided at the cash register this fall.

OVERHEARD

"Tell me when PlayStation 3 ships and I will tell you we are going to be there at the same time."

—Chief Xbox Officer Robbie Bach on when we will see Microsoft's successor to Xbox, in an interview with the Calgary Herald

"Well, I watch **a lot of porn**..."

—Cinematic Lead for Halo 2 *Joseph Staten on which movies have influenced him*

"Maybe it might compete with people on planes, **but in the schoolyard,** I don't think people will be able to walk around with it and treat it as roughly as you do with Game Boy."

—Sony Europe President Chris Deering on how his company doesn't see its upcoming PSP handheld system directly competing with Nintendo's

"To accelerate, press accelerate."

—The helpful in-game guide for Enter the Matrix

LI'L PREVIEWS: CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE SCIENCE-FICTION KIND

ADVENT RISING

Xbox • Majesco • Early 2004 — Sci-fi novelist Orson Scott Card (*Ender's Game*) helped write the story behind this third-person action-adventure, in which an average human must use his latent psychic powers (and a lot of guns and vehicles) to survive massive battles with aliens and human combatants.

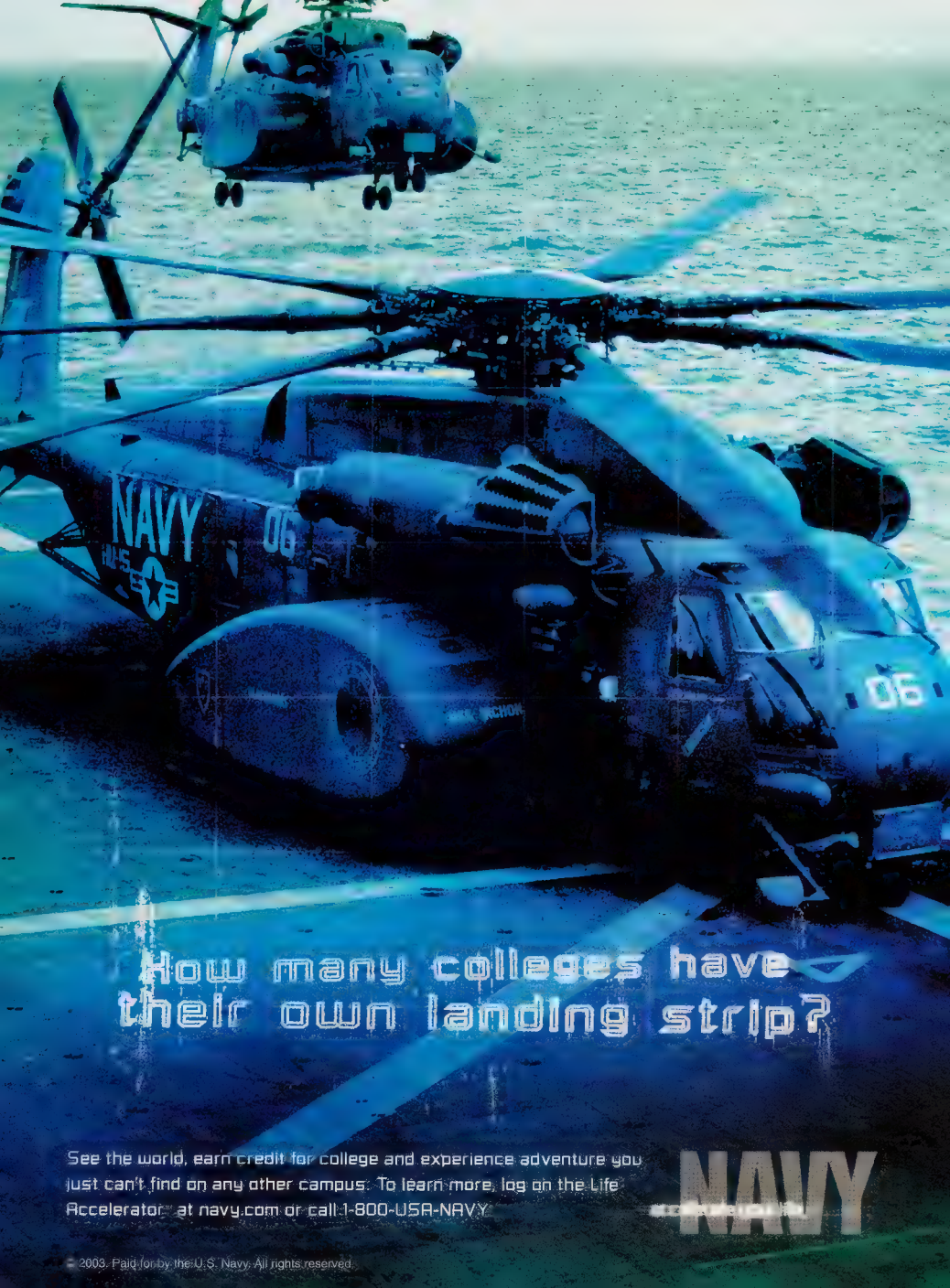
METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM

Xbox, GC • VU Games • November 2003 — In this robot-shootin' action game, Glitch is a rebellious droid who can swap out his arms with parts such as machine guns, buzz-saw flingers, and an item that'll hack into your cybernetic adversaries' minds to make them do your bidding. Like cleaning your car real nice.

SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX

PS2 • Sammy • Spring 2004 — No, this isn't based on Akira Kurosawa's classic black-and-white samurai film. Rather, *20XX* is a futuristic *Shinobi*-esque action game *inspired* by said flick. Blasphemy? Well, it worked out OK before with a little movie called *The Magnificent Seven*. Take that, cinema snobs.

INFINIUM LABS IS LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD BETA TESTERS TO TEST-DRIVE ITS PHANTOM CONSOLE. YOU CAN REGISTER FOR THE CHANCE AT WWW.PHANTOM.NET....


How many colleges have their own landing strip?
See the world, earn credit for college and experience adventure you just can't find on any other campus. To learn more, log on the Life Accelerator™ at navy.com or call 1-800-USA-NAVY.
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Bitter Enemies, allied schemes, and War Council directives intertwine in a rich tapestry of intrigue!

●54 Scenarios plus one fictional story ●Over 600 Commanders plus 100 Officers you create
●1 to 8 players, with over 40 different endings ●Forge relationships through new events such as "Marriage" and "Sworn Brother"
●15 new Tactical skills including "Firearrow," "Ambush," and "Magic" ●Begin the game at any year

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E-T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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PlayStation®2

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Dynasty Tactics™ 2

三國志戰記

The Sequel to IGNPS2's Reader's Choice for Best Strategy Game of 2002

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- New Tactical Chain System
- Play as Lu Bu, Cao Cao, Sun Ce, or Liu Bei
- Epic New Stories with Multiple Branches and Endings
- Twice the Number of Tactics as the Original
- Join Allied Officers for Devastating Team Attacks

PlayStation®2

XBOX

Available Now September 2003

GOOD FEELINGS JAPAN GAME OK!

Behold eight curious cuties from the land across the sea

Prophylactics branded with Hello Kitty characters? A soft drink called... Sweat? There's really no figuring out some of the products spawned in the Land of the Rising Sun. Could be all those pesky radioactive-super-lizard rampages....

Whatever the case, Japan *is* responsible for some exceptionally cool (if occasionally kooky) videogames. To wit, the following samurai showdown of games could only have come from our friends to the far east. Lucky for us, they're all on the way here over the next few months.

Illustration by Itsuo Ito

1 PUSH DOWN FOE BY SKILLFUL SHINOBI ACTION

KUNOICHI
PlayStation 2 • Publisher: Sega • Developer: Overworks • Fall 2003

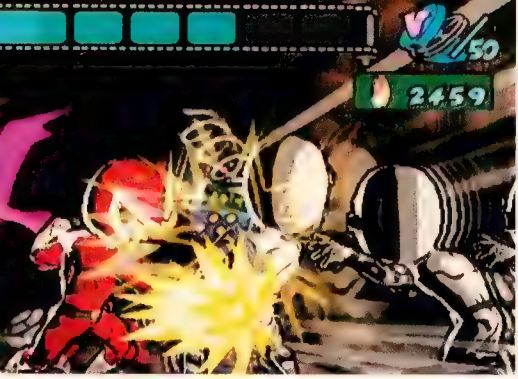
Ninjas are as uniquely Japanese as apple pie is distinctly American (let's forget the *American Ninja* film series for the moment). And just as apple pie sates our appetite, ninjas fulfill our desire to become a lightning-fast killing machine.

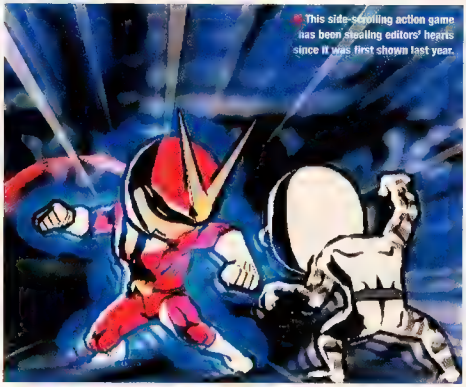
Successor and side story to last year's *Shinobi*, the shapely *Kunoichi* comes equipped with twice the number of attacks and techniques present in the previous ninja-action game. The expanded combo system means a wider array of death-dealing techniques at your disposal before you pause, sheath your blade, and watch as your lacerated foes slide apart in your wake.

Your finely honed skills, including enhanced aerial combat and a lethal new move that surrounds your opponents with shadow images, will be put to the test while you battle atop fighter jets (as seen in the cinema stills above and to the right) and moving trains, and in other places where speed and precision are key and only ninjas dare to tread.

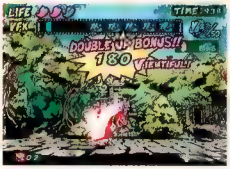
Will Sega's *Kunoichi* give Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* (see page 62) a run for its shuriken?

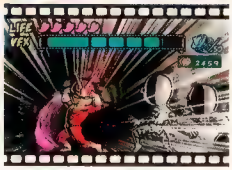
PUBLISHER ACCLAIM NABBED LICENSING RIGHTS TO AWARD-WINNING COMICS PROPERTIES *100 BULLETS* AND *RED STAR*. WE AT LEAST CAN EXPECT STELLAR STORYTELLING....





This side-scrolling action game has been stealing editors' hearts since it was first shown last year.





2 HENSHIN A-GO-GO, BABY!

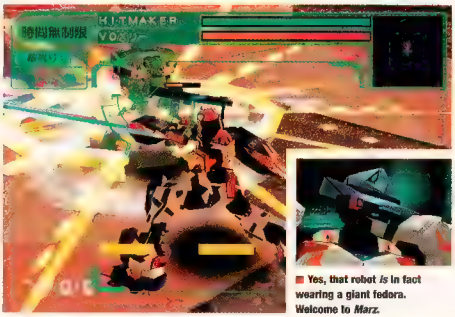
VIEWTIFUL JOE

GameCube • Publisher: Capcom • Developer: Capcom • October 2003

Paying homage to both Japanese masked-hero TV shows and the side-scrolling beat-em-up, *Viewtiful Joe* is fully conscious of its uniquely flamboyant image. Having inherited a super-hero mantle from the aging Captain Blue, Joe must fight with strength and grace through "the world of the movies" (expect a number of familiar film-themed stages) in order to save his smooch-crazy girlfriend.

The premise may be intentionally derivative, but for Joe, it's all about looking good. Using film-inspired superpowers, our hero beats up the bad guys with panache. Lag time with Slow so you can dodge enemy attacks and counter with effortless flourish, or use Mach Speed to pummel opponents with the speed of light. You can also Zoom In to perform an exquisitely finessed superpowerful blow. Simply viewtiful.

3 CLASH! HIGH-SPEED ROBOT OF DESTRUCTION



Yes, that robot *is* in fact wearing a giant fedora. Welcome to *Marz*.

VIRTUAL ON MARZ

PlayStation 2 • Publisher: Sega • Developer: Hitmaker! • Winter 2003

There's something about a giant humanoid robot that's distinctly Japanese—*especially* when that robot sports ponytails and a schoolgirl outfit. Along with the occasional oddball mecha design, *Virtual On* offers fast-paced heavy-metal deathmatches that require a greater degree of finesse than you might expect. The series normally relies on a twin stick arcade controller to provide an intense tactile experience. Fortunately, the DualShock seems to be a capable substitute in the series' trademark high-speed battles.

The metal-on-metal Versus combat feels as solid as high-tensile composite alloy, but the specialized control and game mechanics seem ill-suited to navigating the open-area, multi-target missions presented in the story-based Dramatic mode. Still, if you crave run-and-gun robo action, you'll need to get your *Virtual On*.

4 DIDACTIC, SAD TALE

DORORO

PlayStation 2 • Publisher: Sega • Developer: WOW • Early 2004

Sega's hack-n-slash samurai adventure tells a story so twisted and bizarre that it could only come from the pages of Japanese manga (aka comic books). It goes like this: In 15th-century Japan, a nobleman promises the body of his unborn son to a seething cadre of demons in exchange for power. To each fiend, the child loses one limb or organ—and there are 48 fiends to appease. Gee, thanks Dad.

As the child matures, his missing parts are replaced with numerous prostheses that are not only utilitarian, but also conceal a copious cache of deadly weapons. With the aid of a nimble, young female thief, he hunts down the demons of his past and reclaims his humanity, one body part at a time, with rugged hidden blade slinging, sickle and chain swinging, and hollow-leg bazooka-busting fury.

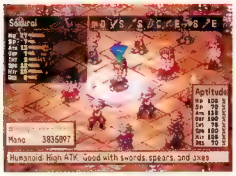
As you might imagine, this eclectic and high-caliber arsenal should help make the translation from manga to videogame a violently easy one. The promise of co-op play doesn't hurt, either. As with *Kunoichi*, Sega isn't showing gameplay screens yet, but we're keeping our eyes peeled for this interesting weirdie. Freak or unique? We'll see. ➤

Not to be confused with Sega's *Otogi* for Xbox, which is almost normal by comparison.

Dororo reveals the hidden blade he has for a hand. It's great for close shaves, but don't ask us how he goes to the bathroom.

>> BE VERY AFRAID. FILM COMPANY ARTISAN ENTERTAINMENT HAS PICKED UP THE ABYSMAL GAME-TO-MOVIE *THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD* FOR RELEASE IN THEATERS THIS FALL ... >>

5 BOASTFUL PRINCE FROM DEMON BOUNDARY!!!



DISGAEA

PlayStation 2 • Publisher: Atlus • Developer: Nippon Ichi • Fall 2003

The strategy-RPG is a very particular subspecies of role-playing game popularized in Japan. Often recognizable by their big-headed, stubby-limbed combatants and the affixation of the word *Tactics* to either end of the title, this subgenre has proven to be a hardy strain.

As if strategy-RPGs weren't uncanny enough, *Disgaea* chronicles the ascension of an egomaniacal prince to the throne of the netherworld. Orchestrate outrageously complex multicharacter beatdowns with your demonic penguins, grapple with the laws handed down by the mysterious and bureaucratic Dark Assembly, and visit alternate dimensions...within your weapons. Weird like a beard, man.

7 ALL ALONE SHIP FACES DEEP SPACE FURY

GRADIUS V

PlayStation 2 • Publisher: Konami • Developer: Treasure • Winter 2003

The side-scrolling shooter could be interpreted as an allegory for post–WWII Japan: Just as the small spacecraft is forced to scroll left to right in a hostile new environment, the proud island nation was...well, maybe not. But there is a certain Zen-like essence to shooters that only the initiated can detect. Skilled players can enter a state of intense focus and total concentration, leaving external distractions behind and controlling their vessel as an extension of their own being. Deep, huh? With Treasure (developer of *Ikaruga* for GameCube) at the helm and new upgrade and option mechanics in tow, this next *Gradius* should look dead sexy to old-school-shooter fans.

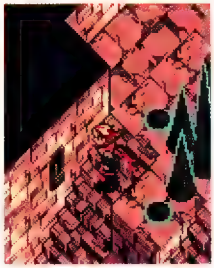
6 LET'S DEPEND ON A WARM POWER OF THE SUNSHINE

BOKTAI

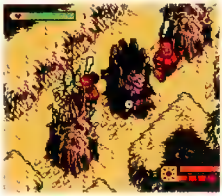
Game Boy Advance • Publisher: Konami • Developer: Konami Japan • September 2003

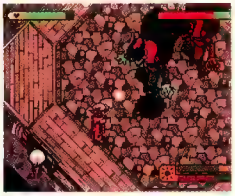
You and your vampiric enemies respectively live and die by the sun in *Boktai*. While conditions in the game change according to an internal clock, a solar sensor built into the cartridge absorbs and channels sunlight into the game world. Don't bother trying artificial light—the bloodsuckers can tell the difference.

Imagine sneaking into a vampire's castle at daybreak, dragging his coffin into the open, and scorching him with rays from the very sun above your head. Crazy gimmick...or the next evolution in interactive gaming? You'll know soon enough.



■ Meet teenage vamp hunter Django—quite possibly the first vampire hunter to wear shorts to work.





■ The cost of giant squeaky toys could set you back for life in *Monster Rancher 4*.

8 PLEASE GROW MONSTER TO PLEASANT SENSATION!

MONSTER RANCHER 4

PlayStation 2 • Publisher: Tecmo • Developer: Tecmo • Fall 2003

Even as thousands of unloved *Tamagotchi* virtual pets lie dormant at the bottom of closets and landfills around the world, unmistakably Japanese monster-raising and collecting games like *Pokémon* continue to amuse and delight young Western palates. Back at the ranch, Tecmo has gone to great lengths to provide a breeding and training title that's more than just a *Pokéclone*. *Rancher 4* offers the ability to create different monsters from your own CD/DVD collection—just pop in a disc and, depending on what your PS2 reads off it, a new kind of monster is born. Series veterans should appreciate taking monsters they've raised off the farm and into the world for RPG-style adventures with revamped battle elements, keeping more creatures on your ranch (it can be tough once they've seen the big city), and the line's return to a less cartoony look. — *Justin Speer*

THE STAR POWER OF NO DOUBT WAS NOT ENOUGH TO SAVE VIVENDI'S PS2/XBOX ACTIONER *MALICE*. AFTER A LONG AND ARDUOUS DEVELOPMENT, THE TITLE'S BEEN CANNED...

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Tournament Launches, August 2003

Revenge.

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Blood
Violence

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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MIDWAY

GOT HACK?

The past, present, and future of pseudo-online RPG .hack

Episodic gaming—breaking up one big story over a series of separate titles—has been a buzzworthy topic for years, but it took a developer built from the ashes of a construction company (yes, seriously) to really pull it off. (We'd count Sega's *Shenmue*, but it left players hanging without a final installment.) That developer is CyberConnect2 and the series is *.hack* (pronounced "dot hack"), an offline role-playing saga for PS2 that thinks it's online-enabled. Its unique concept—simulating a massively multiplayer online RPG (called "The World") that begins infecting the real world—has helped *.hack* become one of the top-selling PS2 games so far this year. With the third of four planned installments, *Outbreak*, due for release in October, we thought it was time to put the *.hack* virus under the microscope.

The underlying idea is to bring the exciting world of online gaming to the unplugged masses, according to CyberConnect2 President Hiroshi Matsuyama. "*.hack* started about three and a half years ago when we brought the concept to [publisher] Bandai," he explains. "That was when people started saying that online games were the next step. But many junior high and high school kids in Japan don't have their own phone lines and they can't pay the monthly fees, so we wanted to let them experience online games in an offline manner."

The inspiration of dividing the game into episodes didn't come until the developers met with Bandai and *.hack* story writer Kazunori Ito. Together, they decided to use the traditional Japanese method of *kisho tenketsu*, or telling the story in four parts: introduction, rising action, turning point, and ending. From there, the *.hack* infection has spread to other forms of entertainment, including a popular anime series (available on DVD and currently running on Cartoon Network), manga comics series (coming in September from Tokyopop), and even a Japan-only version for cell phones. True fans will have their hands (and schedules) full—the anime and manga explore different parts of the story line, working to provide more background to the overarching *.hack* plot.

Though we've still got parts three and four to look forward to (see sidebar below), the game's future after that remains a mystery. "The concept of *.hack* is new and interesting—there's something slightly off about it," says Daisuke Uchiyama, project leader for Bandai. "So whatever the next *.hack* is going to be, it's going to have to be something like that again."

As for *.hack* taking the plunge and actually becoming a real online game, don't count on it. "We get asked that question a lot: 'Why don't you do an online game?'" Matsuyama says. "But we think what makes *.hack* interesting is [that it's a] fake online game, played offline. So we'd like to keep that. If we were to make an online game, it would be something completely different.

—*Chris Johnston*

Meet Kite, your persona in *.hack*'s "World." His blades slice, dice, julienne, *and* do waffle-cut fries.

.hack's in-game word-balloon chatter (center) and e-mail and message-board setup (right) make you feel like you're online even though you're not.

the end is near

.hack//Outbreak

Outbreak, the third part of the *.hack* story (check back next month for a review), hits the PS2 in October, and picks up right where the last game, *Mutation*, left off. This chapter brings in characters from the TV series (*.hack//Sign*), a new server with additional lands and towns to explore, two more kinds of the hog-like Grunties (think *Final Fantasy*'s Chocobos, but...piggier) to race, new alien enemies, and more. Then, in December, the fourth and final installment, *Quarantine*, completes the tale. Will Kite find out who's behind "The World" and save his friend from the coma he mysteriously slipped into after playing? Will Batman escape from The Penguin's sinister trap in time to rescue the Boy Wonder? Oh, wait.

>> THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE FOR XBOX DO-ANYTHING-YOU-WANT RPG *FABLE* (COMING IN 2004, BARRING MORE DELAYS) HAS OPENED. CHECK IT OUT AT WWW.FABLEGAME.COM... >>

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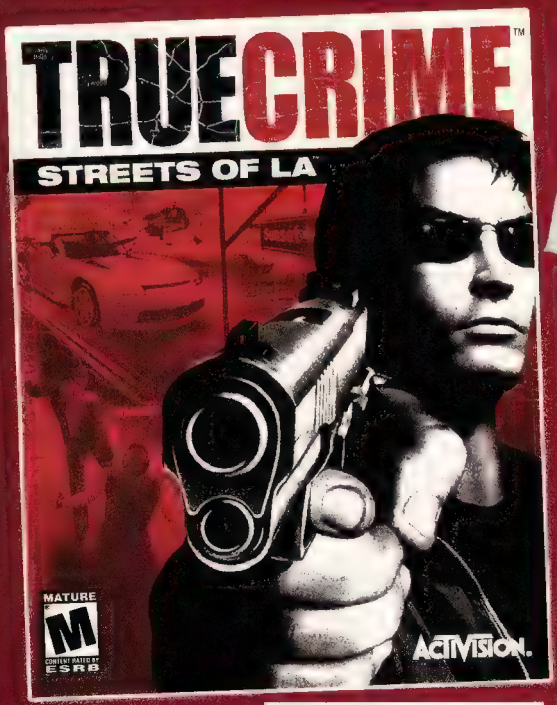

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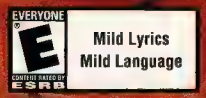

Mild Lyrics
Mild Language

PlayStation 2

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A simple sword slash too easy? Fire a volley of arrows, chuck throwing stars, or pull out the nunchakus for a close encounter. Hey, it's your choice—you're the ninja.

"Hmm...I've been carrying around this big metal X for a while now—what the? Maybe I should stick it in that big X-shaped hole in the wall. Maybe that'll do something."

>> PLAY *CRAZY TAXI* IN A TAXI: A HONG KONG COMPANY HAS (ILLEGALLY, OF COURSE) CREATED A $170 PORTABLE VERSION OF SEGA'S DREAMCAST, COMPLETE WITH MINI-LCD SCREEN.

BACK IN BLACK

Tecmo's classic Ninja Gaiden returns. Asses, prepare to be kicked

It's been over a decade since Ryu Hayabusa's blade, shurikens (throwing stars, for those who don't speak ninja), and spirit power smote evil and righted wrongs on the 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System. Oh, Ryu has tussled with the buxom, pillow-fighting gals of the *Dead or Alive* series, but that's not serious ninja business. This November, he'll finally come out of retirement in the Xbox-exclusive *Ninja Gaiden*.

Of course, the burning question on the minds of many an old-school *Gaiden* fan is, what was the freakin' holdup? "We're never satisfied with a low level of quality—that's why it took us this long," explains developer Team Ninja's supreme leader, Tomonobu Itagaki. "We are always looking for ways to maximize the visual stimulation and the [experience] of playing the game. I want to do that so well that your mind will be numbed from it."

Well then, break out the drool bibs, because if the short demo we played and the shots on these pages are any indication, you're gonna get that tingly feeling quite often. "This is a 100 percent action game," says Itagaki, who's goal with *Gaiden* (as with his other titles, like the *Dead Or Alive* series) is to create a constant sensation of lightning-fast action over the path of more cerebral gameplay. "There's no puzzle element [in *Ninja Gaiden*] that's [just] matching items or pictures. [If I want to] think, I'll use my brain to fight."

You'll use your noggin to string together combos and otherwise dispatch hordes of soldiers, tanks, and other modern-day threats, in addition to supernatural creatures like the giant zombie dragon boss you see here. And you'll do battle in just as wide a variety of locales, from a sprawling cityscape to the top of a flying blimp. "Since we're utilizing a full 3D environment, there are a lot of hidden things in it," Itagaki adds. One of these secrets may be a fully playable version of the original NES *Gaiden*—at least, when we asked about such a possibility, Itagaki's answer made it sound more than likely. "If you're satisfied with such a simple and easy idea that's easy to do," he says. "You can expect it." —*Chris Johnston*

Team Ninja's attention to detail is stunning (and the reason development has taken so long). Slice off an enemy's arm and it gets some hangtime before falling to the ground.

It's a classic confrontation: ninja versus giant zombie dragon skeleton (possibly from outer space).

IF YOU'RE STROLLING THE STREETS OF HK JOHN WOO-STYLE AND COME UPON IT, JUST REMEMBER: IT'S NOT AN OFFICIALLY SEGA-SANCTIONED PRODUCT, SO BUYER BEWARE... >>

SOLID SYDNEY

Superspy Sydney Bristow sneaks into new Alias game

It's nice to see a TV license that actually lends itself well to a videogame. *Alias*, ABC's popular plot-twisting, security-breaching, shootin' and kung-fu-in' spy-versus-spy series is making its way to PS2 and Xbox this November as a stealth-action game, with players assuming control of supersleuth—and superbabe—Sydney Bristow. To ensure an authentic experience for fans of the show, all the major cast members have agreed to lend their voices and likenesses to the game (including Jennifer Garner as Sydney), with the series' writers and producers also working closely with the development team at Acclaim.

Gameplay is in the *Metal Gear Solid/Splinter Cell* stealth-action mold; Sydney must talk to contacts to get clues and mission objectives, sneak to avoid guards and cameras (or walk right past them in one of her infamous disguises), and sometimes fight her way out of jams. As for the story, all we know so far is that it will include characters and elements from the show's second season (which ended in a huge cliffhanger last May). But, as any *Alias* fan could guess, no doubt it will involve a lot of exotic accents, sexy rubber outfits, at least one European nightclub scene, and a friend who double-triple-crosses you.

—*Greg Ford*

alias contest

You've drooled over Jennifer Garner and her *Alias* exploits long enough—test your fan quotient to win prizes like the first season of *Alias* on DVD, the game, or a trip for two to the set of the show. Enter on the Web at http://alias.egmmag.com.

Sydney [illegible] ms hurts [illegible] more [illegible] not literally."

Garner plays with here—er, plays a game that stars the character she pl—ah, forget it.

ACTIVISION IS SUING VIACOM, CLAIMING THE COMPANY IS NEGLECTING *STAR TREK*, LOWERING THE VALUE OF ACTIVISION'S 10-YEAR DEAL TO EXCLUSIVELY MAKE *TREK* GAMES...

P.N.03

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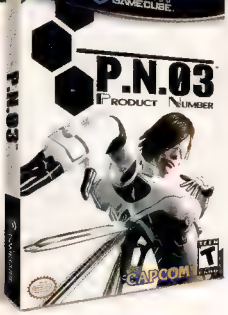

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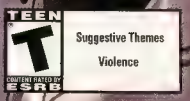

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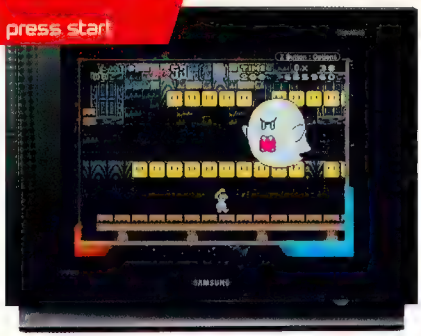


■ Four out of five optometrists agree: Using the GB Player (below, under the GameCube) to play GBA games on a television just plain looks better.

DON'T BE A GB PLAYER HATER

Game Boy Player gives Cube 1,000+ games...sorta

Cancel that trip to Albuquerque—the days of waiting for a travel-based excuse to play your favorite Game Boy Advance titles are over. Thanks to Nintendo's Game Boy Player, you can now finish up *Metroid Fusion* on the big screen in the comfort of your living room. The slim Player (free with new GC consoles as part of a recent Nintendo promotion, or $50 sold separately) slots in under the GameCube and lets you play all manner of Game Boy games (old black and white, Game Boy Color, and Game Boy Advance) on your television.

Thankfully, this isn't just another gimmicky e-Card doohickey or useless Robotic Operating Buddy—the GB Player offers tangible and immediate gaming satisfaction. From a technical standpoint, GBA games have never looked so swank. You can zoom in to make the GBA's rectangular screen fill most of your (more square-shaped) television with minimal loss of clarity, and the colors look much more vivid on a television. We wouldn't recommend it for older Game Boy and Game Boy Color games, though—those chestnuts haven't aged well and blowing 'em up results in a jagged, chunky mess.

The Player's on-the-fly interface for changing border designs and screen filters (normal, soft, or sharp) works perfectly, and you can use the GC controller's directional pad or analog stick for movement, with two layout configurations for all your button-mashing needs. Overall, it's a solid add-on for the Cube, especially if you're looking to spend serious, hand cramp–free time with GBA role-playing or strategy titles. Think of it—*Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* on your television…you know you want it.

■ Bring your *Wario Ware* addiction home.

highs and lows of the gb player

CONS:	PROS:
•Only available in black (sorry, purple and platinum Cubes) •Multiplayer games require link cables and GBAs	•Slick interface •GBA games look great on it •Adds 1,000+ games to the Cube's library

LI'L PREVIEWS: HEADIN' OUT TO THE HIGHWAY

R: RACING EVOLUTION

PS2 • Namco • Fall 2003 — No, we haven't made a mistake; this isn't a screen of the latest *Gran Turismo*. It's the product of *Ridge Racer*'s new "evolution" from arcade racer to full-blown driving simulator, complete with licensed vehicles. We'll miss those powerslides and over-the-top cars, but it's about time *Racer* was retooled.

THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS

PS2 • VU Games • November 2003 — Yes, you'll have to wait until the end of this year to fulfill your "be Vin Diesel for a day" fantasies. And with *Tokyo Xtreme Racer* series developer Genki at the wheel, expect to be able to customize your ride to attract more sweet, sweet hot eys. Because that's really what it's all about. Or so we hear.

CHARTS

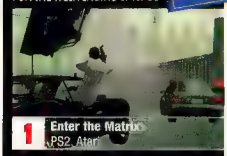
TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES FOR MAY 2003

1	Enter the Matrix	PS2, Atari
2	Enter the Matrix	Xbox, Atari
3	NBA Street Vol. 2	PS2, EA Sports Big
4	Wolfenstein: Tides of War	Xbox, Activision
5	Brute Force	Xbox, Microsoft
6	Pokémon Ruby	GBA, Nintendo
7	Pokémon Sapphire	GBA, Nintendo
8	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	PS2, Ubi Soft
9	Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition	GBA, Konami
10	Midnight Club II	PS2, Rockstar

Source: NPD TRSTS Video Games Service. Call (516) 625-6100 for questions regarding this list. Ask for Guillermo.

TOP 10 GAME RENTALS FOR THE WEEK ENDING 6/15/03

BLOCKBUSTER



1	Enter the Matrix	PS2, Atari
2	The Hulk	PS2, VU Games
3	Midnight Club II	PS2, Rockstar
4	NBA Street Vol. 2	PS2, EA Sports Big
5	Enter the Matrix	Xbox, Atari
6	Midnight Club II	Xbox, Rockstar
7	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	PS2, Ubi Soft
8	Brute Force	Xbox, Microsoft
9	Wolfenstein: Operation Resurrection	PS2, Activision
10	Def Jam: Vendetta	PS2, EA Sports Big

Source: Blockbuster Video, 6/15/03

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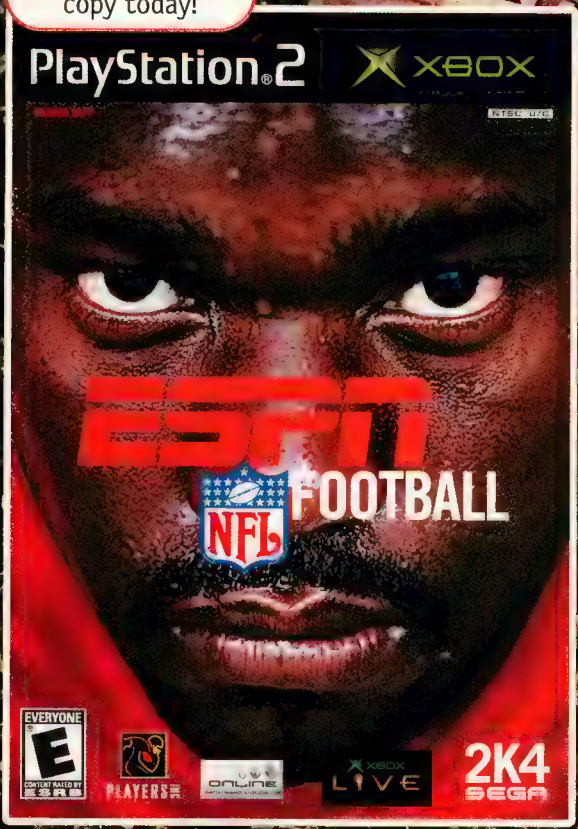

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VIDEOGAMES ARE BAD FOR YOU...

With the biz raking in about $11 billion per year and even President George W. Bush admitting to dabbling in digital entertainment (we hear you can't tear him away from *FreeCell* on PC), games have never been more widely accepted. Of course, that also makes our pastime a juicy target for politicians and parenting groups. So for you readers having trouble sorting the good from the bad, here's a primer on the top five talking points on both sides of the bitch fest—or, dialogue. ***—David Kushner***

Games make you dumb

Leave it to Japan, the mothership of videogames, to come up with a study finding that games damage the brain. At Sendai's Tokohu University, Professor Ryuta Kawashima discovered that Nintendo games arouse parts of the brain associated with sound and vision but don't stimulate other areas. "We will have a problem with the new generation of children who play games," Kawashima concludes. "The implications are serious for an increasingly violent society, and these students will do more and more bad things if they just play games and don't do other things like read aloud or learn math."

What a croc: Does *EverQuest* beat real life? We hope not.

Games isolate you

Consider the tragic death of Shawn Woolley, a young fan of *EverQuest* who took his life after an online lover allegedly spurned him. Woolley's mother now runs Web-based support group On-Line Gamers Anonymous for people who've become isolated and outcast as a result of chronic game playing. It boasts 650 members and counting.

Games addict you

Parents, spouses, and an increasing number of scientists are exploring the phenomenon of so-called "videogame addiction," most common among fans of massively multiplayer online RPGs such as *EverQuest*. Addicts forgo work, relationships, and even food for the sake of their online play. Three recent cases in Asia involved young men at computer cafes who passed out at their PCs after marathon gaming sessions. Now, psychologists are getting in on the action: At McLean Hospital, a Harvard-affiliated psychiatric teaching facility, Maressa Orzack oversees the country's first computer-addiction services, a clinic offering counseling to compulsive gamers.

Games screw up your body

Lately, game critics have set their sites on the damage done by game controllers: the buzzing, rattling devices that, they say, inflict pain on your paws. Last year, the British Medical Journal published an account of a 15-year-old kid who suffered burning sensations and inflammation in his digits as the result of spending seven hours a day on his PlayStation. Doctors determined that he was experiencing "hand-arm vibration syndrome" brought on by one too many nights at the controller. Sounds like a textbook case of "wanker's elbow" to us, but whatever.

Mortal Kombat: campaign eye candy.

Games cause violence

Of all the problems critics have with videogames, none gets more lip service than this one. The controversy broke back in 1993 when Senator Joseph Lieberman led a campaign against *Mortal Kombat* for its spine-ripping gore. He even dragged children's television host Captain Kangaroo in front of reporters to warn of "the lessons learned by a child as an active participant in violence-oriented videogames...lessons the thinking parent would shun like a plague. Indeed, it could become a plague upon their house." Since then, everyone from the Surgeon General to the American Psychological Association has attempted to link video violence with the real thing, but a conclusive, universally accepted study has yet to surface.

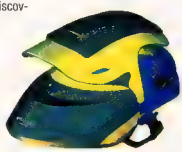
A NEW TOURNAMENT-BASED GAMING LEAGUE—CALLED MAJOR LEAGUE GAMING—KICKS OFF IN NEW YORK CITY THIS SUMMER. CHECK WWW.MLGPRO.COM FOR THE SCHEDULE...

...VIDEOGAMES ARE GOOD FOR YOU

NASA: Using rocket science to make children less spacey.

Games make you smart

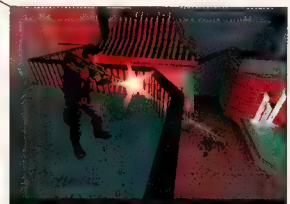
Studies released by both Manchester University and the University of Central Lancashire concluded that gamers who played for 18 hours per week exhibited the kind of hand-eye coordination displayed by professional athletes. Dr. Jo Bryce, who led the research, discovered that hardcore gamers went into a concentrated state of "flow" (you know, "the zone"), which allowed them to accomplish multifaceted tasks. She's not the only true believer. A recent study at the University of Rochester found that kids who play action games on a regular basis are far better at processing fast-moving visuals than youngsters who don't get busy with the joypad. And NASA has developed a biofeedback system using PlayStation games such as *Spyro the Dragon* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* to help build concentration skills in fighter pilots. A company called Attention Builders is marketing a home version (pictured to the right) of NASA's videogame wares—just the thing to power your brain before those midterms.



Feed your head: Trick kids into getting brainier with the Attention Trainer helmet. See attention.com for info.

Games improve literacy

Videogames weren't meant to replace books. Nevertheless, critics like to complain about how all this game playing has whittled away the literacy rate. But games have actually been proven to do just the opposite. Psychologists at Finland's University of Helsinki found that specially designed videogames could help dyslexic children improve their reading abilities. And you don't have to be dyslexic to benefit. As any well-read gamer who's trekked through a modern console RPG will tell you, these games come with a novel's worth of dialogue to digest.



Bullet buddies: Tweedy intellectuals claim *Counter-Strike* (Xbox) can bring shy gamers out of their shells.

Games are social

Professors at Loyola University in Chicago recently conducted a study of the community surrounding *Counter-Strike*, the popular PC first-person shooter that's also on its way to Xbox. Their findings: Such online games cultivate complex social interactions that defy the stereotype of the isolated gamer. For some reason, critics—particularly people who have never *played* games—can't grasp the concept of socializing in a virtual space. But that's precisely what happens in shooters, in online RPGs like *EverQuest* and *Phantasy Star Online*, and even in so-called Net parlor games like backgammon and chess. Games provide a means of social interaction for teenage boys and blue-haired old ladies alike.

Games relieve stress

While politicians and parents bemoan videogame violence, they fail to acknowledge one simple point: Games are a harmless way to blow off stress. After all, the fighting is virtual, the guns are fake, and the blood is pixilated. Even the most violent first-person shooters are little more than digital paintball. If people are so up in arms about game violence, why aren't they decrying *real* paintball, which leaves players with golf-ball-size welts? Meanwhile, researchers at Indiana University found that game playing causes the brain to release dopamine, a pleasure-inducing chemical. See, games are scientifically proven to make you feel good.

Games heal the body

Hip physical therapists have found a surefire way to improve their patients' rehabilitation process: Let them play games. Dr. Mark Griffiths, a psychologist at the U.K.–based Nottingham Trent University, conducted a study of how games are being used for physical therapy. "Much has been written about how boring and repetitive exercises are if someone is attempting to recover from an [injury]," he says. "The introduction of videogames into this context can be of huge benefit." His therapies range from using games to build muscles to training diabetic children to better self-administer their medication.

Illustration by Sean Tiffany

THE APES FROM *APE ESCAPE 2* (PS2) WILL MAKE A CAMEO APPEARANCE IN TECMO'S MONSTER-BREEDING ADVENTURE GAME *MONSTER RANCHER 4*....

AREA 51 EXPOSED!

New first-person shooter subverts mankind for coming invasion!

Top investigators at *EGM* have discovered the existence of a dangerous cabal intent on unleashing the secrets of *Area 51*—a game set inside the government's extraterrestrial research center—on an unsuspecting public late next year. Led by developer Inevitable (*Tribes Aerial Assault*, *The Hobbit*) and publisher Midway, this conspiracy aims to pave the way for an imminent alien invasion by creating a mind-altering first-person shooter based on the well-known *Area 51* coin-op series. This insidious Trojan horse will run on PlayStation 2 and Xbox consoles (which themselves contain alien mind-control technology, according to anonymous sources).

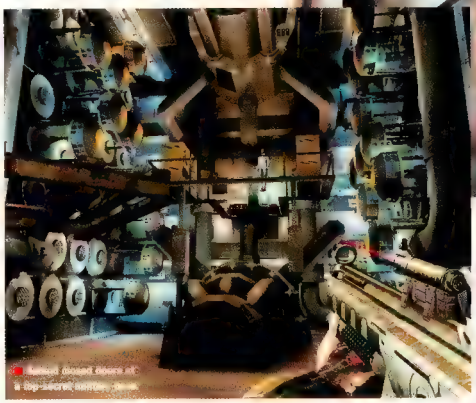
The unwitting player will believe he is Lt. Nick Cross, a biohazard specialist who is infected by a mutagen within Area 51 and slowly becomes an alien-human hybrid. In other words, *Area 51* is a thinly veiled "mutator simulator" that trains normal people to use alien abilities, such as increased strength and multiple weapon capability. When the conspirators release the mutagen in the real world, no doubt these pre-trained warriors will become officers in the extraterrestrials' hybrid army!

To snare and indoctrinate as many human sheep as possible, *Area 51* will combine exploration and puzzle-solving with a heavy dose of combat training, some of which will echo the shooting-gallery feel of the previous *Area* light-gun arcade games. *EGM* spoke with a known human sympathizer within the group—who we'll refer to only as "Chris Mowry, assistant producer at Midway"—to learn more. "This game will take players very deep into the heart of the base itself," he told us, where they'll encounter such horrors as "stealth soldiers that are completely invisible to the naked eye, alien autopsies, faked lunar landings, and genetic engineering." Mr. Mowry also revealed the existence of characters you'll need to defend in order to progress. "At times you're going to have to trust something that looks like one of the mutants you were just shooting at," he said, just before hopping out of our car and escaping into the night.

Additional leaks reveal that *Area 51* will support multiplayer conditioning with splitscreen, system link, and online play in various modes (including co-op). Shocking.

The threat is real. Stan Winston Studios has already been pulled into the collusion. The creature designers and makeup artists for many cautionary tales (*Aliens*, *Predator*, and *The Thing*) now serve the conspirators, translating their horrible unearthly visages into *Area 51*. For your own safety, we urge you to watch this plot carefully. Beware!

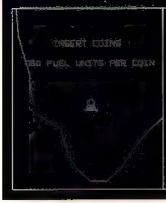
—*Paul Byrnes*



Hey E.T.—want some 9mm Reese's Pieces?

"Attention, Area 51 employees. Cleanup on level four, cleanup on level four."

INCREDIBLE BUT TRUE: MORE SHOCKING GAME CONSPIRACIES!



Lunar Lander
This classic coin-op's simple vector graphics re-created the event when NASA faked a moon landing to distract us from the Vietnam War. Activision's *Space Shuttle* game? Also based on phony events.

Urban Yeti
This Game Boy Advance game single-handedly proves the existence of Sasquatch: His movements in the game were motion-captured from a real live Yeti! We think the chupacabra makes a cameo in there, too.

Killer Bees
Released for the Odyssey 2 system in 1983, this game warned us of bee swarms from outer space vulnerable only to "Rosha beams." (There's never an Eddie Albert around when you really need one.)

EIDOS WILL BRING HARDCORE PS2 SPACE SHOOTER (AND FINALE TO THE CLASSIC SERIES) *R-TYPE FINAL* TO THE U.S. UNDER THE FRESH GAMES LABEL LATER THIS YEAR....

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GRAND LARCENY

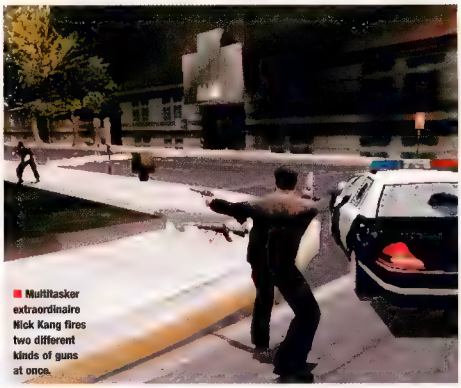
Is True Crime A New Hope for GTA-style games or merely an Attack of the Clones?

Ever since *True Crime: Streets of L.A.* was first announced last year, it's been compared to *Grand Theft Auto*. And not without good reason: the ability to commandeer any car in town, the mission-based gameplay, the gritty and realistic setting, the celebrity voicework (in this case by the likes of Christopher Walken, Gary Oldham, Michael Madsen, and Michelle Rodriquez)—it all seems oddly...familiar.

"The truth is, they're both in the same genre," says *True Crime*'s Executive Producer Chris Archer, "just like *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid*. *True Crime* has all of the things you liked in [*GTA*], but there are a lot of things that are different. We've tried to make sure that each element of the game is really deep."

Of course he's paid to say that, so we decided to take the game for a test drive and judge for ourselves. With a few months left before its October release on all three major consoles, does *True Crime* look like it could carjack the money-rich crime genre away from *GTA*? Here's how it's shaping up in a few key categories.

The *True Crime* game map spans Los Angeles' 240 square miles (that's six times bigger than *The Getaway*). They don't call it urban sprawl for nothin'.



Multitasker extraordinaire Nick Kang fires two different kinds of guns at once.

DRIVING

Developer Luxoflux was responsible for the driving/shooting series *Vigilante 8* (PS1, DC, N64), so the company obviously knows its way around an automobile. "I give props to the other games, but driving is Luxoflux's specialty," Archer says. "We beat the hell out of everybody (in this area)."

Life behind the wheel starts out as you'd expect, but later, you learn advanced skills at L.A.P.D. driving courses, such as peeling out, using turbo, quick-stopping right in front of another vehicle to cut it off, and getting your car up onto two wheels. You can even master the maneuver of executing a 180-degree spin, shooting at the vehicle behind you (while still driving—backwards!), and then spinning back around, all without stopping.

Car chases can be pretty intense when you're the pursuer, too. If the bad guy you're after crashes his ride and you don't cuff him fast enough, he'll jack another vehicle and take off. "We've had chases go from Santa Monica to downtown," says Archer. That's more than 15 miles. (Cool.)

SHOOTING

"I think we definitely stack up [to *GTA* here] because we give the player more options," says Archer. "We have a nice, really simple system that also allows for depth."

How does it work? When your gun is drawn, the game automatically locks your sights onto the closest bad guy or, for precision shots, you can manually aim using a targeting reticule. That's just like in *GTA*, but it's only the start of *True Crime*'s gunplay. Over time, you learn more skills at the firing range, such as blasting multiple targets at once and sharp-shooting while driving (so you can put a bullet into a tire, gas tank, or even that pesky driver). You'll also gain accuracy, targeting speed, and new weapons. And *Dead to Rights* fans, take note: You can use bad guys as human shields and dive in slow motion while firing. ➤

A RECENT STUDY FOUND THAT FEMALE *EVERQUEST* CHARACTERS SELL ON EBAY FOR 10 PERCENT LESS, ON AVERAGE, THAN MALES. SO MUCH FOR WOMEN'S LIB IN NORRATH...

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WWW. CODE JUNKIES .com

Stealth is sometimes an option in missions where you don't want to go in with guns blazing.

Christopher Walken's character, George, runs the L.A.P.D. shooting range and will praise or berate you when you visit, depending on your performance.

FIGHTING

"We beat them all outright [in the fighting department]," says Archer. "It's more advanced than anything in this genre."

In most games like this, fighting mano-a-mano is limited to simple punches and kicks. *True Crime* adds jump and grapple moves from the start. Then, as you gain access to karate dojos around town owned by your brother, you learn combos, running attacks, new grapples, and finishing moves you can perform once you stun an enemy, like cuffing them when they're down. The fighting system isn't as deep as you'd find in a dedicated fighting game, but it is more advanced than those in recent action games like *X2: Wolverine's Revenge*.

THE VERDICT

The game isn't finished yet so we can't say anything *completely* definitive after spending just a few hours with such a huge game, but what we played was entertaining, loaded with subtleties (like the aforementioned advanced fighting, shooting, and driving skills) and unique elements. In these last few crucial months the developers still have to nail the camera during the game's fighting sections, tighten the vehicle control a bit, and perfect the manual targeting, but right now, it's looking like writing off *Streets of L.A.* as nothing but a *GTA* clone would be the true crime.

—*Joe Fielder*

True or False Crime: Can you identify which of the following statements are fact and which we made up?

1 The shortest branching path through *True Crime* gets you only 40 of the game's nearly 100 missions. (There are also more than a hundred random crimes happening out on the street.)

2 Though the final soundtrack is still unannounced, *True Crime* will have more than 25 original songs made specifically for it, including tunes from such artists as Compton native Ice Cube.

3 You can frisk people walking down the street (fascist!) and sometimes find weapons or illegal contraband on them. There are apparently a lot of people packing heat in L.A. Art imitates life, eh?

4 Many of the game's bonus missions are based on famous L.A. crimes. (Don't be too surprised if you end up behind a white Ford Bronco in a slow-speed chase down the highway.)

5 If you shoot hookers on the street, expect three pink cadillacs to roll up on you. Cap some businessman and you might get attacked by guys in suits with briefcases.

Answer: All true.

ITEM! KONAMI AND UPPER DECK ARE SPONSORING A *YU-GI-OH!* WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN ON AUGUST 12 (SEE WWW.YUGIOH-CARDS.COM)...

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TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS

PLAYSTATION 2

UNLIMITED MONEY

In the Persian Ghetto, talk to the women and then go into the pawn shop. Then talk to the man in the pawn shop and then leave. After that, go straight until you get to a sewer drain. Pick up the small item you see there—it's money. Go back to the pawn shop. Then leave the pawn shop. Return to the sewer drain. There will be money there once again. Continue doing this as many times as you need for all the money you'll ever need!

SONIC ADVENTURE DX

GAMECUBE

SUPER SONIC CODES

Sonic Chaos
Level Select:
Press Up (4X), Right, Left, Right, Left, Start when "Press Start" appears at the Sonic Chaos title screen.

Sonic Labyrinth
Level Select:
Press Up (2X), Right (3X), Down (6X), Left (9X) when "Press Start Button" appears at the Sonic Labyrinth title screen.

Sonic Spinball
Level Select:
Enter the "Sound Test" option for Sonic Spinball. Then, play the following songs in this order: 0, 2, 1, 5, 6, 6.

Sonic The Hedgehog 2
Level Select:
At the Sonic The Hedgehog 2 title screen, Tails will blink his eyes three times (blink once, then two times quickly). While holding Down/Left+A+B, tap Start just when his eye shuts on the second blink of the double-blink.

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

XBOX

USE THE FORCE!

* Search every gray box and canister for items, and follow the directions of the characters you meet...as long as they're not sporting Sith battle armor!

* Need information? Ask a protocol droid. Need to be talked down to? Chat with any Sith patrolling the city. Lastly, if you insult the cantina patron Gana Lavin, you'll face two Rodian scum near the Store Tower in battle!

* Bendak Starkiller has a bounty on his head as a smuggler. Visit Javanar's Cantina in the Lower City, find Bounty Officer Zax the Hutt, and commence this bounty hunt before you defeat Starkiller in the final fight; there's a sizable cash prize!

Hidden characters, extra weapons and undiscovered worlds are all at your fingertips. Cut out the cards, slip them into the game's case for a quick trick. When you get the itch, punch in these codes and really get into the game.

*Check out **www.getintothegame.com** to download a coupon for **$5 off** any game on this card. While you're there, get the scoop on all the hottest games and accessories.*

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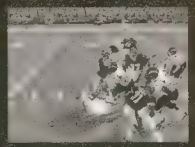
MADDEN NFL 2004

PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

PIGSKIN PLAYS

An interception begins with pressure on the quarterback, but you don't need to record a sack to blow up a pass play. This heavy rush produces a wounded duck pass as the quarterback smacks his arm on a defensive lineman's helmet.



If your linebackers are overmatched against the run, try blitzing the strong safety. One more defender in the gap is usually enough to shut down the inside run.

Use Playmaker on offense "before the snap" to shift your play away from the pressure. Here, the strong safety is cheating toward the line, ready to stop the run. A quick flip of the stick changes the running play to the opposite side.

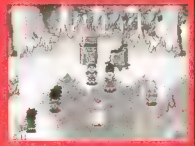
In Owner Mode, you'll need to build a new stadium at least once during your 30-year franchise run. This requires bushels of cash; so don't forget to raise ticket, parking, and concession prices when your team is winning.

DRAGONBALL Z: LEGACY OF GOKU II

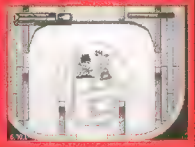
GAME BOY ADVANCE

HOT TIPS!

Increase Health
Save the game and reset. Then chose another player and start a new game. Then switch back to the first player and you should have full health.



Increase Experience
Before you get Goku, go to the Northern Mountains. Find the barrier that Goku is supposed to break. There should be a dinosaur behind it. Hit the dinosaur through the fence and you will gain a ton of experience.



Get 99 Cookies
Go to Capsule Corp. and keep talking to Bulma's mom. After a while she will reward you for your kind hospitality by giving you 99 Cookies. Cookies recover 5 HP.

Sweet Spot
At the start of the game, where you fight at the Capsule Corp. building, if you stand to the right of any of the pillars, you will be un-hittable to your opponents. You will be able to hit them, but they can't hit you.

THE HOBBIT

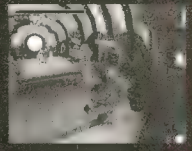
PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

SKILLS OF THE RING

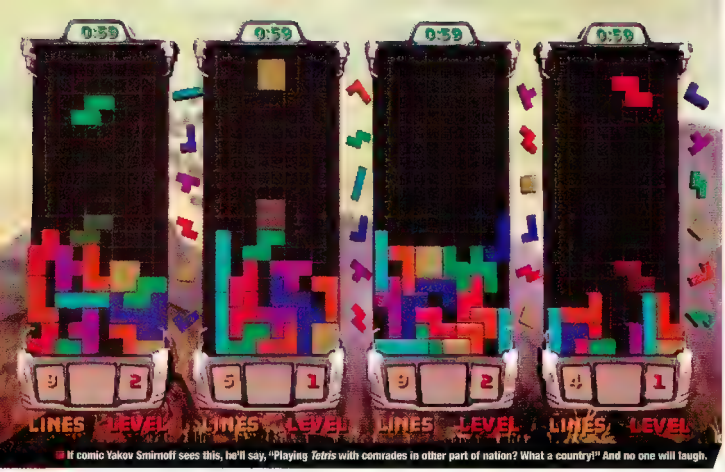
- When the need arises, Bilbo can move as silently as a mouse. Hold down the sneak button and move using the analog stick. Instead of running, Bilbo hunches over and creeps along on his tiptoes.

- For such a little guy, Bilbo has some hops. Press the jump button to make him leap into the air. Now he can get to those hard-to-reach places.

- Bilbo can perform a special jump attack to deliver more damage to an enemy. First, equip him with a weapon, such as his Walking-stick. Make sure the power meter in the bottom-left corner is full. Press the jump button, then the attack button, and Bilbo slams down the weapon.



- Press any direction on the analog stick to send Bilbo sprinting. Move the camera angle with the right analog stick to steer Bilbo in the right direction.



If comic Yakov Smirnoff sees this, he'll say, "Playing *Tetris* with comrades in other part of nation? What a country!" And no one will laugh.

ONLINE THIS MONTH

Reach out and Tetris someone

Join a game already in progress and you'll get to stare at this very exciting lobby screen.

Worlds lets you hold one piece for later use (circled above) by tapping the R trigger.

Puzzle fans, slap on those headsets. THQ's *Tetris Worlds*—previously released only as an offline title—is now available for Xbox Live. The standalone game costs $20, but if you're new to Live, it's included in the updated Starter Kit that's on sale now.

Worlds online opens the standard *Tetris* formula to include one to four players, with a variety of more complicated modes thrown in for good measure (though honestly, they're not as good). Voice chat is supported, but we find most games go by silently except for the occasional "Oh s***!" (Hey, it's hard to talk and set up Tetrises at the same time.) New to the Live game is a Lounge mode, where you can chew the fat with your friends over the voice communicator and not worry about scores and rankings.

Despite its addictive (and boy, is it ever) nature and low price, *Tetris Worlds* still isn't the perfect *Tetris*. We can't get past the on-by-default Easy Spin, which lets *Tetris* newbies spin pieces infinitely before they "land," thus keeping them alive longer. Plus, you can't watch games in progress if you just joined—instead, you have to wait patiently in the lobby and hope the host notices you wanna play. Still, for $20, it's worth it just to play classic *Tetris* against the world (a console feat only attempted once before to disasterous results in the painfully bad *The Next Tetris: Online Edition* for Sega's Dreamcast). If you decide to check it out, make sure the *Worlds* box you buy has the orange "Live Online Enabled" label at the top. Now show us your skillz, f00lz.

This month on egmmag.com:

Log onto our website and check out our complete interview with the creators of the PS2 RPG ***.hack***, as well as a Q&A with the designers of ***SSX3***, EA's tricky snowboarding title.

must-hit websites

planetdreamcast.com/psoworld/ Visit the venerable fan site PSO World to learn how to get those rare mags, find special holiday items, and go through the downloadable quests in *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II* (Xbox, GameCube).

dlgitpress.com Home of the all-inclusive *Digital Press Collector's Guide* (a must-have book for videogame pack rats), this site offers reviews, quizzes, and other content skewed to the true classic gamer. No PlayStations allowed.

geocities.com/krapdivad/quiz.htm What kind of *Soul Calibur* character are you, really? Find out by taking this handy little quiz to determine which of the combatants best matches your personality. We're the cool and confident Mitsuru!

PC GAMING UPDATE

Men in tights—only the PC's got 'em!

Freedom Force

Console gamers have been playing with comic book stars for years, while the supply of superheroes on the PC has been puny to say the least. But that's been changing lately, primarily due to ports of both the good (*The Hulk, Spider-Man*) and the bad (*X2: Wolverine's Revenge*). That said, the best comic book game ever came out only on the PC last year and—get this—it wasn't even a big-name licensed property.

Freedom Force is so good and such a dead-on depiction of Silver Age comics that they should sell it with a protective Mylar bag and backing board. From the hysterically over-the-top origin sequences to the silly in-battle catch phrases, everything in *Freedom Force* is a beautiful blend of spoof and tribute as you create and oversee your very own team of superheroes. It's a rich and detailed role-playing/strategy hybrid that has you managing challenging squad-based tactical combat as well as forcing you to make the tough choices as you develop your personal Justice League. The game's huge cast of characters also gives it a ton of replayability. But if you'd rather save the day with known heroes, it's no problem—you can create your own caped crusaders from scratch, and finally assemble that long-cherished dream team of Too Much Coffee Man, Evil Ernie, Radioactive Man, and Dazzler. Best of all, you can probably find *Freedom Force* for less than $20 in the bargain bin of your local software depot.

The future of comic book gaming on the PC continues to look bright with the development of *City of Heroes*, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game scheduled for sometime next year. But that's a discussion for another day...

—*Robert Coffey, Computer Gaming World*

>> BUCCANEERS' DEFENSIVE STUD WARREN SAPP REPLACES THE BEARS' QB BRIAN URLACHER AS THE COVER ATHLETE FOR SEGA'S GRIDIRON FRANCHISE, *ESPN NFL FOOTBALL*... >>

PERIPHERAL VISION

Quirky add-ons for the gadget-minded gamer

Most of you, like us, have sophisticated tastes when it comes to gaming gizmos—that's why we here at *EGM* don't bother covering the same ol' boring peripherals you've already seen 1,000 times. (Honestly, how many Spider-Man–themed controllers does the world need? No, really, how many? When will the madness end?!) But every now and then, an original game gadget appears, so this month, we've gathered the weird, the wild, and—yes, we're just gonna say it—the downright wacky in accessories, all available right now in the Spider-Man controller section of a store near you.

—Shawn Smith

Remote Free

Nyko • Price: $8 • www.nyko.com

Sure, Sony's PS2 remote is sleek and comes with the newest version of the PS2 DVD driver, but it's 20 bucks and adds another freaking remote to the mound you've got going on the coffee table. Solution: The Remote Free is a little $8 receiver that lets you use practically any remote to control your PS2's DVD playback functions. Just map the buttons, pop some popcorn, and you're ready to watch *Master of Disguise: Special Edition.*

Pyramat

Pyramat • Price: $149 • www.pyramat.com

Sometimes, it's just not comfortable to sit for hours on end, playing your favorite first-person shooter. No problem—lay down instead. The Pyramat (not pyramid, pyra*mat*!) is available in a couple of models, but the PM300 is the one with balls: Built-in speakers and a sub-woofer right inside the headrest ensure total immersion and potential hearing loss as you recline in horizontal splendor. Let's just hope your brain doesn't turn to mush from all of those low frequencies.

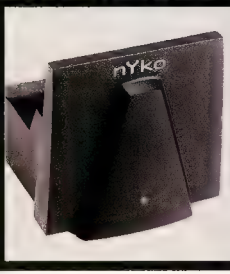
freaky gizmos of the not-too-distant future

Pyramat not doin' it for you? Maybe the devices that'll pique your interest aren't available yet. Here's a look at the cool gear that'll hit stores later this fall.

STEALTH LINK

Triton Labs • October 2003
Price: TBA • www.tritonlabs.com

You and a friend break out your adult-gone-gamer-styled GBA SPs for a couple rounds of *Mario Kart Advance*. Problem is, you don't want to be tethered together with a standard link cable like a couple of kindergarteners on a field trip to the zoo. The Stealth Link allows you to multiplay from up to 100 feet away, no cords attached—something more akin to Bluetooth than *Blue's Clues.*



WIRELESS NET EXTENDER

Nyko • October 2003
Price: $99 • www.nyko.com

The age-old dilemma of connecting the consoles in your rumpus room to the PC in your home-office for Net access has been solved in one fell swoop—and for a song. Throw away that 100-foot Ethernet cable, because the plug-and-play Net Extender allows you to get your PS2, Xbox, GC, and/or PC online without cumbersome cables, thanks to RF technology.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III IS HEADING TO JAPAN, BUT FROM AN UNLIKELY SOURCE—CAPCOM. TOO BAD VERY FEW GAMES DESIGNED OUTSIDE OF JAPAN ARE A SUCCESS THERE...

GameShark Media Player

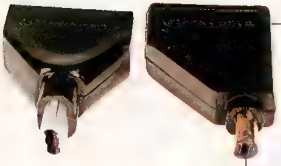
MadCatz • Price: $50
www.madcatz.com

The remote-control-compatible GameShark Media Player turns your PS2 into an all-in-one multimedia powerhouse. Use the Player to listen to MP3-encoded music, leer at JPG images, and watch MPEG and DivX videos you stream from your PC via the Network Adaptor hook up. Heck, it even has 16:9-ratio screen support for HDTVs. Now, you don't need to import expensive hardware from Hong Kong to watch Video-CD-quality porn. Woo!

Charge Cradle

Pelican Accessories
Price: $10 • www.pelicanacc.com

Feel like a hotshot, PDA-wielding executive assistant with this charge cradle for the Game Boy Advance SP. Pelican's on-the-cheap station will juice you up in a couple of hours—just enough time to get in a few episodes of *Elimidate*. No need to mess with a pesky AC adapter every time you need a power infusion—who can figure out that Moon-man technology anyway? When your SP is fully charged, the cradle's indicator lights up to let the world know.



Universal Cable Extender

Gemini • Price: $10 • www.gemini-usa.com

Does the length of your controller cord cause feelings of shame and inadequacy? If you've got a PS2, Xbox, and Cube under one roof, then this cable extender is the answer to your prayers, Stubby. It'll increase your pad's reach by some 10 feet. What's more, it comes with adapters for all three main consoles, and recoils when not in use—so no more cables lying around the floor or in a mess under your TV. Now that's something a guy can feel good about.

THE EQUALIZER

Gamester • Fall 2003
Price: $35 • www.gamesterusa.com

Let's say a friend stops by for a quick round of *Soul Calibur II*. And let's say said pal beats the living snot out of you time and time again. Annoying, to be sure, but there's no need for real-life revenge like punching and kicking. Instead, simply press the Equalize button on the Equalizer pad and the playing field slants your way—your chum's controls will be jumbled for a few key moments, allowing you to gain the upper hand. Estimated time before this product causes an altercation between old pals: 30 seconds.

DESERT ISLAND GAMES: TIGER WOODS

Every month, we ask a celeb or game designer the eternal question: If you were stranded on a deserted island, what three games would you want to wash up on the beach? Golf maestro Tiger Woods lists his picks.
—Marc Saltzman

Madden NFL 2003
(PS2, Xbox, GC)
"The game is so deep, it keeps you entertained for hours. I play against my buddies—we get so competitive—but I also play Minicamp mode and work on my skills."

Medal of Honor: Frontline
(PS2, Xbox, GC)
"Every time I play this game, it's like watching a movie, except now you are in the middle of all the action. Everyone needs to put their Army cap on and go fight."

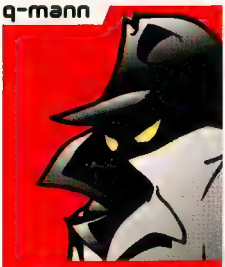
Resident Evil 2 (PS1)
"Since I will be in a bright, sunny place with beaches all around me, I'll need something dark—this game invites you into its environment with incredibly detailed graphics and terrifying gameplay."

TREVOR GODDARD, THE ACTOR WHO PLAYED KANO IN THE ORIGINAL *MORTAL KOMBAT* MOVIE (1995), WAS FOUND DEAD ON JUNE 7, 2003 FROM AN APPARENT DRUG OVERDOSE.

THE RUMOR MILL

Gossip with a side of fries

q-mann



SUMMER LOVIN'

Ah, summer—the sun, the surf, and the incredibly uncomfortable heat. It's enough to make me forget about delivering my monthly sack o' rumors to you. But wait! I can't! Must...fulfill...gossipmongering duties. Damn you, Puritan work ethic! As always, if you have any comments for ol' Q, send them to quartermann@ziffdavis.com. See you in 30! —*The Q*

The girls of *DOA* prepare for a winter's nap.

Star Fox (Super NES)

Chip off the old...chip

If you're old enough to remember when Nintendo added its Super FX graphics enhancement chip to select 16-bit Super Nintendo game carts (*Star Fox*, *Stunt Race FX*, etc.), then this little tidbit won't completely blow your mind. Current speculation points to the company unveiling a similar chip very soon for Game Boy Advance games (like the Super FX, the chip will be embedded in the game carts themselves), bringing much improved 3D graphics to the li'l handheld. Hmm, anyone for a *Star Fox* remake? Besides me?

DOA Online steps out of line

Chop. Kick. Punch. Oh, hey there—I was practicin' my katas to take on some scrubs in Tecmo's online Xbox fighting anthology, *Dead or Alive Online* (see page 93). But reliable (if unfortunately named) Q-spy Terry Aki has heard vague mumblings that it could be delayed until 2004 to give the big *Ninja* (*Gaiden*, that is) his time in the limelight. It may not all be for naught though—rumor has it the bumped release date could mean extra content for fans. What's that? Do I hear *DOA3* being added to that *Online* package? Nah, couldn't be....

Crossing 2: Save your bells

If you're a fan of Nintendo's life sim *Animal Crossing*, you've probably already heard that a sequel is in the works (and if not, you just did). The Q's spies in Japan have revealed another juicy bit of info: In the sequel, you will be able to design your own furniture. How that'll work, exactly, is unknown, but just the thought of being able to map your custom-made pattern on your custom-built couch gives me a sudden irresistible urge to go buy an issue of *Dwell*.

New Road Rash coming

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again, right? Despite a few unsuccessful attempts in the past few years to revive Electronic Arts' motorcycle violence extravaganza, *Road Rash*, the company is reportedly giving it one more go in 2004. We hear EA's Vancouver, Canada, studio (*Need For Speed Underground*, *NBA Street*) will do the development honors for multiple systems.

Def Jam up the yin-yang

You all loved *Def Jam: Vendetta*, right? Now, how'd you like to be playing *Def Jam: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*? The Q's spies rendezvoused with Eagle One and passed along information which indicates the Def Jam label will be associated with videogame events other than wrestling come next year.

NEWS BITS

Li'l Racers

The latest tricked-out trend from Japan? Game- and real-world-inspired cars shrunken down to miniature RC proportions. But then Hobbico's imported MicroSizers are hardly your typical radio-controlled racers. Customization is key to the tiny 2-inch-long cars' popularity, as the tires, gears, and suspension are all upgradeable with a snap. An *Auto Modellista* four-pack and two *Mario Kart* speedsters (the pudgy plumber Mario and green dino pal Yoshi) are currently doing laps at www.tinyrc.com—snag 'em for less than 30 bucks.

SEPARATED AT BIRTH

Return to Castle Wolfenstein's cross-her-and-you're-dead Nazi dominatrix

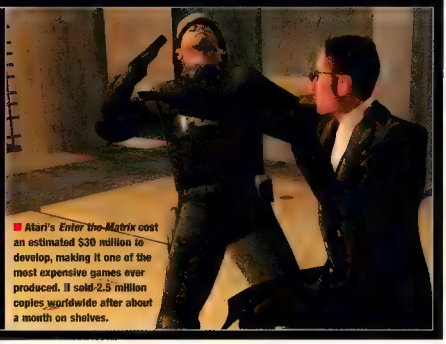
Actress Tracey Gold from saccharine-filled '80s TV sitcom *Growing Pains*

believe it...or not?

Getting your gaming gossip from non-Q-endorsed sources? Foolish mortals!

What you heard: "Game prices will soon go up. Don't be surprised if the next game you buy is $60-$70."

The Q's sources say: Yes, blockbuster games cost a lot to develop. But think about it: would you pay $30 to go see *Terminator 4* because it cost more to make than *Teen Wolf Again*? Doubtful. Good games, like good movies, (hopefully) make up for development costs with sales. But it doesn't mean consumers will pony up $10-$20 more to play (plus it can always backfire and force more gamers to rent instead). My advice? Don't worry. New games are likely to stay around $50 for this generation.



Atari's *Enter the Matrix* cost an estimated $30 million to develop, making it one of the most expensive games ever produced. It sold 2.5 million copies worldwide after about a month on shelves.

ARCADE SNIPER-SHOOTER *SILENT SCOPE* WAS PULLED FROM A THEATER NEAR THE SCENE OF ONE OF 2002'S DEADLY SNIPER SHOOTINGS IN MID-JUNE. TOOK 'EM LONG ENOUGH!...

FRESH FROM THE SEWER!

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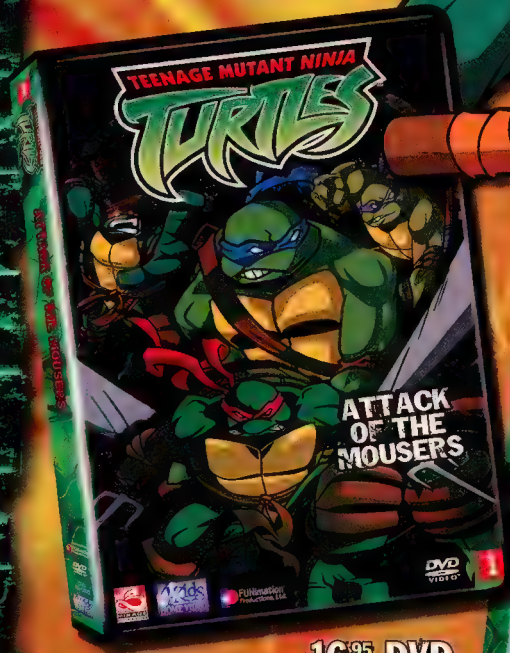

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1. Must remember to throw slider on 0-2 count.

2. Must remember to keep slider out of strike zone.

3. Must remember to get real estate license if 1 and 2 fail.

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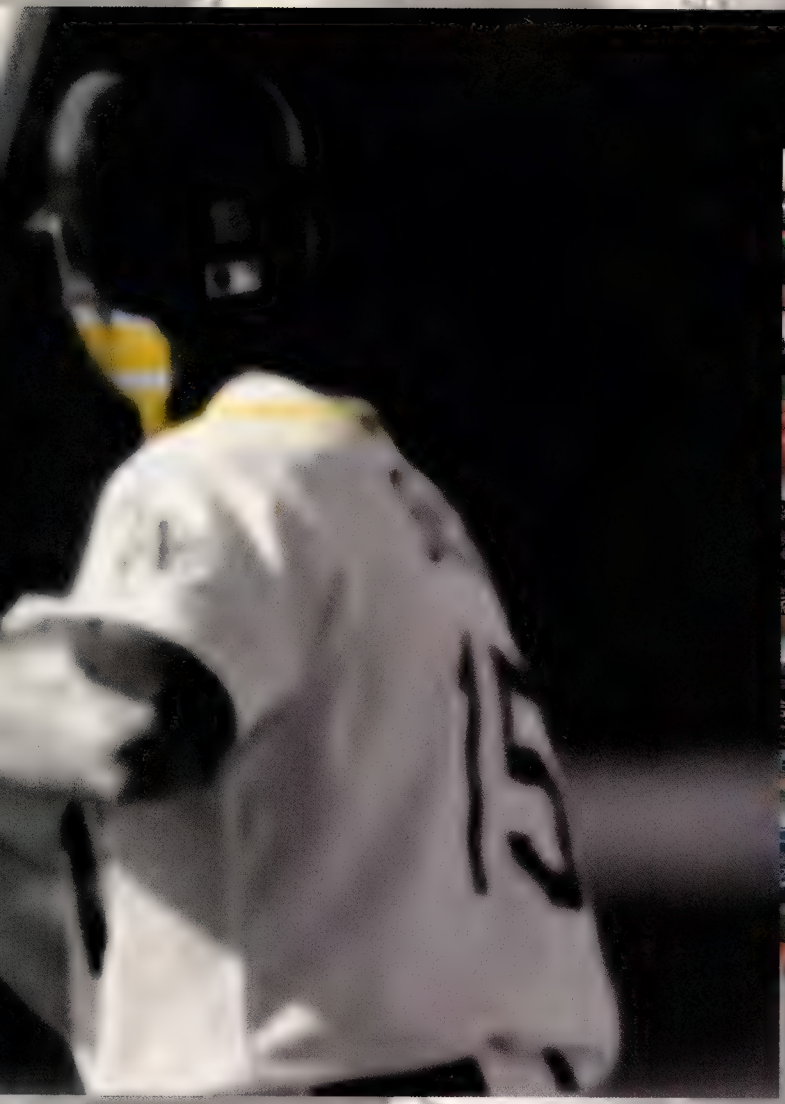
PlayStation®2



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THE HOT FIVE

Updates on the games you want to see more of

Vote for your most-anticipated games between the 1st and 15th of each month at www.egmmag.com.

1

PS2

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

- Publisher: Konami
- Genre: Action
- Release: TBA 2004

Change is good. Sometimes. After *MGS2*'s dramatic (ahem…Raiden) twist, it's hard to say just how many brand-new ideas we hoped to find in *MGS3*. Such skepticism isn't stopping series designer Hideo Kojima and co. from innovating, however, as he recently disclosed that he's hoping to shock players again with *MGS3*. Case in point: two-thirds of *Eater* will take place in the wilderness, which is based upon a real ecosystem and contains uneven terrain. Food will rot and leaves will rustle (and get you spotted) when you step on them—one of many potential ways to show off *MGS3*'s 5.1 channel surround sound. And while the 1960s scenario may limit Snake's gadget collection, Kojima is working to somehow include vehicles in the game.

This soldier better hope that Snake hasn't gotten really hungry living out in the woods.

2

GC

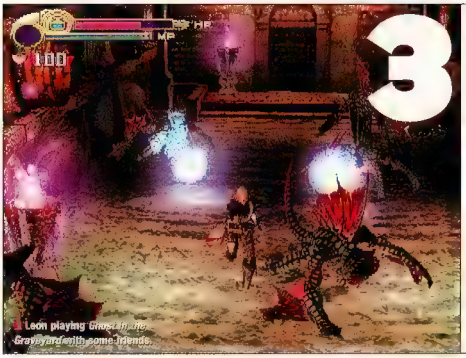
STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

- Publisher: LucasArts
- Genre: Action
- Release: September 2003

If you've read *EGM*'s *Rebel Strike* feature in Issue #167, you already know pretty much everything about this game, but we've dug up a couple of new details. LucasArts has decided to include over 20 minutes of movie footage on the disc, including the classic trash-compactor scene. Also, the multiplayer levels (taken from the last GC *Star Wars* game, *Rogue Leader*) have been made easier and less frustrating. But we're afraid the deflector shield will be *quite* operational when your friends arrive….

Rocks. Why did it have to be rocks?

3



Leon playing *Ghosts in the Graveyard* with some friends.

PS2

CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

- Publisher: Konami
- Genre: Action
- Release: November 2003

If you've been lamenting the lack of new *Castlevania* information, here are a couple tidbits to go with this new screen: Hero Leon's brand-new crystal subweapon will have an important role in *Lament*'s story line (we're guessing he won't be abandoning his plastic-fantastic button-down lifestyle to live on a commune), and we've been told to anticipate roughly 13 boss encounters. Now, if only we could take the whip to those old N64 *Castlevania* games….

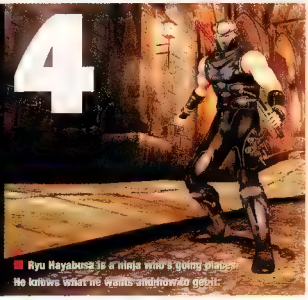
4

Xbox

NINJA GAIDEN

- Publisher: Tecmo
- Genre: Action
- Release: November 2003

Your *Ninja Gaiden* votes aren't for naught—in addition to this pretty new picture, we've bulked up our coverage on page 62 just for you.



Ryu Hayabusa is a ninja who's going places. He knows where he wants and how to get it.

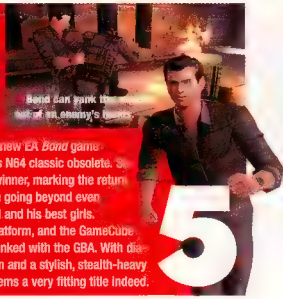
5

PS2, Xbox, GC

007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

- Publisher: Electronic Arts
- Genre: Action
- Release: November 2003

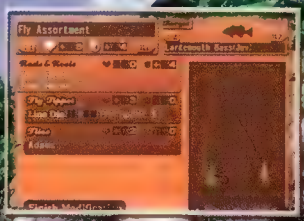
Although *GoldenEye 2* rumors persist, every new EA *Bond* game comes closer to making Nintendo and Rare's N64 classic obsolete. So far, *Everything or Nothing* looks like a sure winner, marking the return of fan favorite Jaws as a boss character and going beyond even *NightFire* to duplicate Pierce Brosnan's Bond and his best girls. Visuals will be uniquely tweaked for each platform, and the GameCube version will include special gadgetry when linked with the GBA. With dialogue by recent Bond scripter Bruce Feirstein and a stylish, stealth-heavy new level set in New Orleans, *Everything* seems a very fitting title indeed.



Bond can yank the [illegible] out of an enemy's [illegible]

>> ATARI'S *FUGITIVE HUNTER* HAS BEEN PUT ON INDEFINITE HOLD AND FACES POTENTIAL CANCELLATION. THE GAME WAS LOOKING PRETTY...QUESTIONABLE LAST WE SAW IT >>

"...the best game of its type this year." -- PS2.IGN



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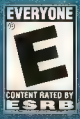
*Based on total franchise sales through 2002 TRST.



PlayStation.2

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COMING SOON

Takin' their sweet time, aren't they?

AUGUST

Alter Echo (Action) PS2, Xbox
The psychedelic environments in this action-adventure game produce prettier colors than an acid trip. Uh...so we heard.

Bombastic (Puzzle) PS2
Roll a lucky seven in the sequel to *Devil Dice* (PS1) and it'll be explosive.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds (Action) PS2, Xbox, GC
The show is over but the franchise lives on. Expect stabbing with stakes.

Cabela's Deer Hunt: 2004 Season (First-Person Shooter) PS2
We hope you have fun killing Bambi's mom, you heartless bastard.

Chaos Legion (Action) PS2
Command an army against McFarlane-toy rejects in this "hitting plus running" game.

Choplifter: Crisis Shield (Action) PS2
Use your piloting skills to rescue people instead of shooting them (for a change).

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Action) PS2
This high-flying kung fu adventure follows the events of the film. Yep, it's subtitled.

Dino Crisis 3 (Action) Xbox
Dinosaur huntin' takes you to—where else?—the outer reaches of space.

DroneZ (Action) Xbox
This is the closest that console gamers will come this year to flingin' *Tron*-like frisbees.

Freaky Flyers (Racing) PS2, Xbox, GC
Crappy show tunes could send this shooting-racing bird into a nosedive.

Futurama (Action) PS2, Xbox
A game based on the Fox cartoon. We're hoping there's some kind of beer power-up for Bender, the lovable robot misanthrope.

F-Zero GX (Racing) GC
We have the need...the need for speed. We have the need for dramamine, too.

Ghost Recon: Island Thunder (First-Person Shooter) Xbox
Castro's gone, but not forgotten. Now go make Cuban cigars safe for American stogie smokers, soldier!

Gladius (RPG) PS2, Xbox, GC
Guide a party of glory-seeking gladiators from Losertown to Victoryville in this turn-based role-playing game.

Group S Challenge (Racing) Xbox
What? We're not good enough to race with the Group R drivers?

Hunter the Redeemer: Wayward (Action) Xbox
The game's four-player Co-op mode makes us hear the words, "Black leather-clad bad-ass needs food badly."

The Last Ninja: The Return (Action) Xbox
We're still scratching our heads wondering when the first ninja left.

Madden NFL 2004 (Sports) PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
The new Owner mode offers everything except the ability to fire Mr. Madden.

Mortal Kombat: Tournament Edition (Action) GBA
We're glad this *Kombat* for your pocket isn't the turd in your trousers that was *Mortal Kombat Advance*.

NCAA GameBreaker 2004 (Sports) PS2
The big college football game from the other guys.

NFL Fever 2004 (Sports) Xbox
Mastering the new passing system will be a challenge even for *Fever* vets.

NFL GameDay 2004 (Sports) PS2
Now, yelling "Hut-hut, hike!" at the television actually snaps the ball if you have a USB headset (but you look like a dork).

Otogi: Myth of Demons (Action) Xbox
Flying and demolishing buildings with a single blow—it's all in a day's work for this samurai demon hunter.

Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire (Misc.) GBA
Will these pocket monsters ever stop invading our GBAs?

Powerpuff Girls Relish Rampage (Action) GC
Take on the infamous Mojo Jojo in a round of preschool fisticuffs? We're there.

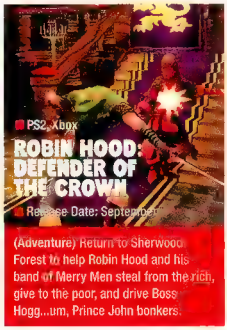
Road Trip: Arcade Edition (Racing) GC
Like Dick Clark, Penny Racers refuse to die. This'll offer a GC-GBA link-up for trading cars, so it's got that going for it.

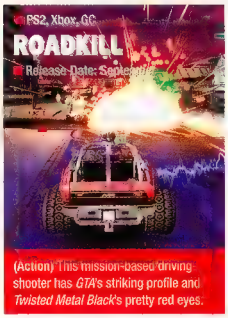
RPG Maker (RPG, duh) PS2
Quit flaming Squaresoft on the Internet and make your own sequel to *Final Fantasy VII*.

Silent Hill 3 (Adventure) PS2
Welcome to Silent Hill. Population: 1 (not counting all the zombies, ghosts, and blood-smeared mannequins).

Soul Calibur II (Fighting) PS2, Xbox, GC
The soul still burns...like a supernova.

Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild (Racing) PS2
Warning! Viewer discretion advised! *Real* jetski co-eds "go wild" on Spring Break!





Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution (Fighting) PS2
Two new characters, no more jaggies, and it's only $20—how can you go wrong?

XGRA (Racing) PS2, Xbox, GC
The fourth title in the *Extreme G* futuristic racing game series has a damn silly name.

SEPTEMBER

1080° Avalanche (Sports) GC
Rip through fresh powder and avoid—surprise, surprise—avalanches!

Backyard Wrestling (Wrestling) PS2, Xbox
The Insane Clown Posse is laughing all the way to the bank with this one.

Battlestar Galactica (Space Combat) PS2, Xbox
Good news—it's based on the classic TV series (look for the SciFi Channel remake this fall). Better news—Warthog (*Colony Wars*—PS1) is the developer.

Billy Hatcher & the Giant Egg (Action) GC
Sonic creator Yuji Naka takes a break from the blue hedgehog to tell a tale about a boy and his incredible eggs.

Boktai: The Sun is in your Hand (RPG) GBA
To hunt down these vampires, you'll actually have to play outdoors—the cart has a built-in light sensor. Invest in sunblock.

Cima: The Enemy (RPG) GBA
The creators of the *Lufia* series have cooked up an all-new tactical RPG franchise on the Game Boy Advance.

Corvette (Racing) PS2, Xbox, GBA
One guess as to what kind of cars you'll be driving. ➤

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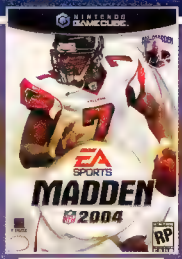

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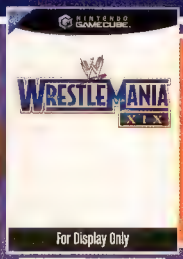

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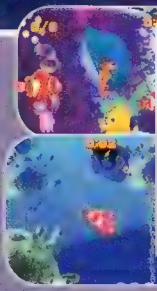

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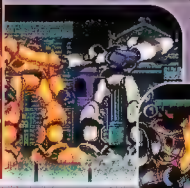

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Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge (Air Combat) Xbox
Swashbuckling and dogfighting in an alternate 1930s setting—on and offline.

DDRMax2 (Rhythm) PS2
Get ready to bust a move to a slew of American pop tunes.

Disgaea: Hour of Darkness (RPG) PS2
Help the rightful heir to the Netherworld throne regain his crown.

Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure (Sports) PS2, Xbox, GC
Mickey and pals take a page (and game engine) from skating legend Tony Hawk.

Dynasty Tactics 2 (Strategy) PS2
A complex strategy game based on a simple action game based on a complex strategy game. Our heads hurt already.

Dynasty Warriors 4 (Action) Xbox
Chinese warlords get served up like a plate of General Tsao's Chicken in this historical beat-em-up.

Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly (Adventure) PS2
Capture more poltergeists on Polaroid in part two of the photogenic frightfest from the makers of Tecmo's *Deception* series.

Final Fantasy Tactics Advance (Strategy) GBA
The PS1 classic gets an overhaul. Will it have a new story line we can actually understand? We had a good feeling!

Freedom Fighters (Action) PS2, Xbox
Think *Red Dawn* minus Patrick Swayze and the shoestring budget. OK, now stop thinking about *Red Dawn*.

Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance (Action) PS2, Xbox
You're a slave who becomes a gladiator and tries to save Rome from an unruly Emperor. Hmm, that sounds awfully familiar.

The Hobbit (Action-Adventure) PS2, Xbox, GC
Join Bilbo Baggins on an epic journey to where he discovered that "precious" item.

Ice Nine (First-Person Shooter) PS2
We'd tell you all about this stealthy first-person shooter, but we'd have to kill you....

Jak II (Action) PS2
Yes, folks, Jak speaks in this shooting-platform game sequel! Now if only his sidekick Daxter would shut the hell up.

Monster Rancher 4 (Breeding) PS2
Enjoy raising your crazy critters with a new training program and breeding system.

MTV's Celebrity Deathmatch (Wrestling) PS2, Xbox, GC
Mr. T pities the fool who decided to make this cancelled TV show into a videogame.

NASCAR Thunder 2004 (Racing) PS2, Xbox, GC
Too much rubbin' during these races will have opponents slamming you into walls.

NBA ShootOut 2004 (Sports) PS2
989 Sports adds 50 roundball legends like Wilt the Stilt and Magic to *ShootOut*'s roster.

NFL Blitz Pro (Sports) PS2, Xbox, GC
Midway increases the number of players on the field and adds online play to the PS2 version (Xbox and GC get no love).

NHL 2004 (Sports) PS2, Xbox, GC
EA's hockey franchise heads online (for the PS2) and beefs up its Dynasty mode.

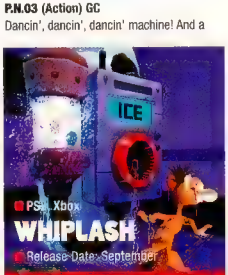
NHL Hitz Pro (Sports) PS2, Xbox, GC
PS2 owners can now test their frozen-pond stick skills online.

NHL Rivals 2004 (Sports) Xbox
Microsoft straps on its hockey skates for the first time this fall.

Onimusha Tactics (Strategy) GBA
Less hack-and-slash, more strategy, but still a whole lot of soul suckin'.

Outlaw Golf (Sports) PS2
Go golfing with underdressed trailer trash in this irreverent sports sim.

P.N.03 (Action) GC
Dancin', dancin', dancin' machine! And a killin' machine as well.



PS2, Xbox
WHIPLASH
Release Date: September

(Action) A weaser and a rabbit, linked by six feet of steel chain, attempt to escape from an evil corporate laboratory in what looks like the funniest game about animal testing yet.

PS2, GC
SPHINX AND THE SHADOW OF SET
Release Date: September

(Adventure) Sphinx and his mummy sidekick, Tutankhamen, must master new abilities to solve puzzles and platform jump in the shadow of ancient Egypt's pyramids.

Resident Evil Code: Veronica X (Adventure) GC
The game's Leonardo DiCaprio lookalike frightens us more than its zombies.

Rise to Honor (Action) PS2
Jet Li lends his mug and martial artistry to this Hong Kong–style beat-em-up.

Shining Soul (RPG) GBA
Sega's classic *Shining* franchise is back (as a decent *Gauntlet* clone) in this four-player GBA RPG.

The Simpsons Hit and Run (Action) PS2, Xbox, GC
You see, it's like *Grand Theft Auto* but with *Simpsons* characters. D'oh!

Star Ocean: Til the End of Time (RPG) PS2
Why does the subtitle sound like the name of a Whitney Houston album?

Star Trek: Shattered Universe (Space Combat) PS2, Xbox
Guide Captain Sulu and crew through classic *Trek*'s little-known "Mirror Universe."

Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike (Action) GC
We can't wait to haul ass on speederbikes through Endor and to take on AT-ATs one! more! time!

Super Mario Bros. 3: Super Mario Bros. Advance 4 (Platform) GBA
Arguably the best *Mario* game ever heads to your favorite handheld. (Could the name be any more confusing?)

Starsky & Hutch (Action) PS2, Xbox
Frankly, you two, the Captain is sick and tired of explaining your loose-cannon shenanigans to the Commissioner.

Time Crisis 3 (Shooting) PS2
Select peacemakers from your newly expanded arsenal while ducking for cover.

Top Spin (Sports) Xbox
Out of the country clubs and into your Xbox comes a tennis game with online play.

True Crime: Streets of LA (Action) PS2, Xbox, GC
Not as much *Grand Theft Auto: Los Angeles* as you would think (see page 72).

UFC: Sudden Impact (Fighting) PS2
The world's toughest brawlers return to the octagon with an all-new Story mode.

Voodoo Vince (Action) Xbox
A 3D platformer that rewards you for torturing the game's star. The power of voodoo transfers the hurt to Vince's enemies.

Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo (Action) PS2, Xbox, GCN
Gromit foils Feathers McGraw's comeback plans with help from Wallace's gadgets.

Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior (First-Person Shooter) PS2
Those mech figurines you lovingly painted come alive and kill you in this shooter. Thankfully, we won't have to count hexes.

WWE Raw 2 (Wrestling) Xbox
Now you and three other of your redneck friends can team up or backstab each other in a revamped Story mode.

WWE Wrestlemania XIX (Wrestling) GC
This wrasslin' franchise ditches its twitch-fest controls in favor of a simulation-style grappling system.

Includes Soundtrack CD!

Haunting new tale

Hideous new creatures

Disturbingly detailed graphics

Brutal new weapons

EveRy THing YoU nEver waNTed tO SeE.

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PlayStation®2

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WARRIORS OF LEGEND. SWORD OF
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HIDDEN DRAGON
Enter the Green Destiny Sweepstakes at
http://crouchingtiger.ubi.com
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

Destiny. Crusade of a Lifetime.

Rediscover the Legend.

Three years ago, **Ang Lee's** *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* became an instant martial-arts classic, earning an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. Now, experience all the kung-fu fury from this martial-arts masterpiece as you execute over 90 wu-xia moves inspired by renowned choreographer Yuen Wo-Ping. Green Destiny beckons you. Rediscover the legend.

4 Playable Characters: Li Mu Bai, Yu Shu Lien, Jen, and "Dark Cloud" Lo.

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Expanded Storyline: Unlock bonuses and experience multiple endings.

Ubi Soft
www.ubi.com

Genki

XBOX

PlayStation 2

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DINO CRISIS™ 3

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BRADYGAMES Strategy Guide AVAILABLE

XBOX

MATURE M Blood and Gore Violence
SOFTWARE RATED BY ESRB

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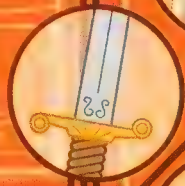
TEN REASONS YOU'LL WANT TO GO ONLINE THIS YEAR



By Jeremy Horwitz and Joe Fielder

Strong reasons to play videogames online were pretty few and far between last year—but that's about to change. We think there are plenty of reasons for even skeptical gamers to hit the Net this fall. Ten of them, in fact.

From ass-kicking encounters with she-ninja hotties to all-you-can-gnaw zombie buffets, the online console experience is about to get a lot more compelling. We tick off ten excuses to connect your game box this year....

THE NEW SIMULATIONS: BIPLANES AND BOTS

For years, glassy-eyed PC gamers have battled online in freakishly detailed airplane dogfight simulators, but competitive air combat has never taken flight on consoles before. Microsoft surprised us recently with ***Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge***, a seriously fun—though not seriously complex—flying and shooting game, complete with stylish planes, zeppelins, gyrocopters, and special aerial moves you perform with button combos. Online dogfights and capture-the-flag sessions add to single-player missions set in an alternate 1930s universe (so you'll get some big-band tunes to go with your big machine guns).

Crimson Skies' polar opposite is Capcom's mech-game sequel, ***Steel Battalion: Line of Contact***, which again requires the world's most complex—and expensive—controller for its futuristic robotic action. (However, Capcom still hasn't said if the controller will be sold separately or packed in.) Designed to appeal to the hardest-core simulation fans, *Line of Contact* has more than 10 new mechs, 5-on-5 collaborative online competitions, and offline play.

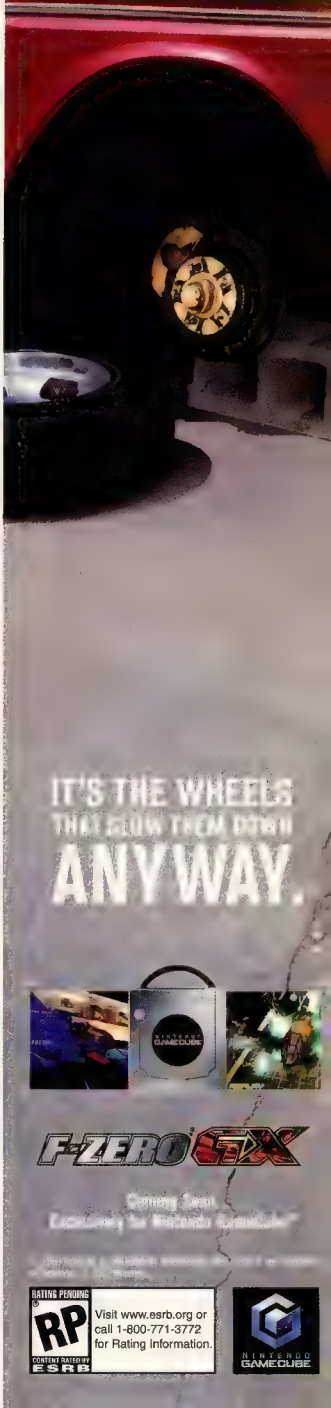
Both games are due for Xbox in October.

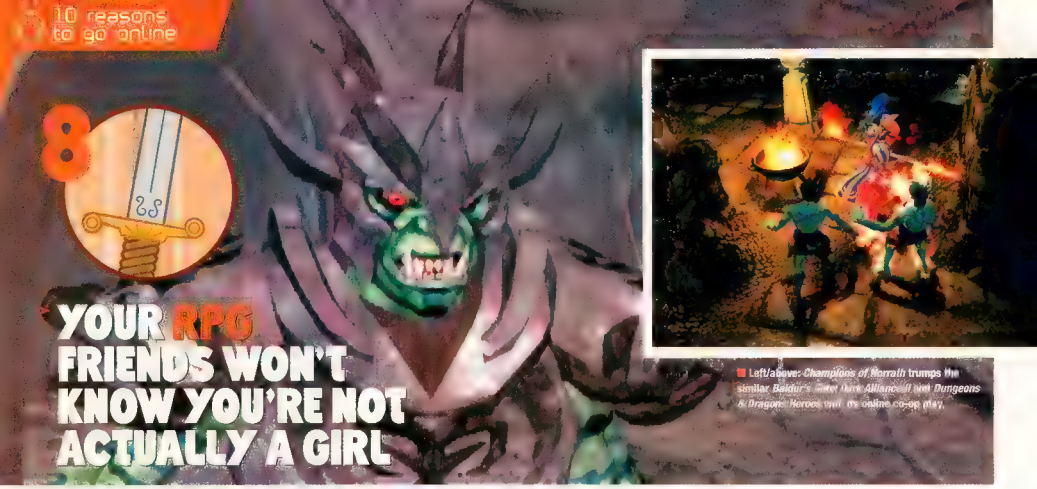
The mechs in *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact* are essentially tanks the size of buildings.

EVERYBODY WAS KUNG FU FIGHTING

Xbox owners have been pummeling each other online in ***Capcom vs. SNK EO*** for months now, and they'll soon have the breast 3D fighting series sound as well. ***Dead or Alive Online*** plays all of *Dead or Alive 3*'s new characters and moves and updated versions of the backgrounds and scenarios from the PS2 and Dreamcast versions of *Dead or Alive 2*. Snowy, rainy, and foggy renditions of *DOA2* stages also appear, along with tons of new customizable costumes and extra story lines. Rounding out the disc for old-schoolers is a cleaned-up Saturn port (previously available only in Japan) of the first *DOA*.

The overdressed take on the underdressed in the *Dead or Alive 2* remake within *Dead or Alive Online*.





8 YOUR RPG FRIENDS WON'T KNOW YOU'RE NOT ACTUALLY A GIRL

Left/above: *Champions of Norrath* trumps the similar *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II* and *Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes* with its online co-op play.

Above: Chat with dorks like us in *Final Fantasy XI*. Below left: *True Fantasy Live Online* characters contemplate the void. Below right: *EverQuest Online Adventures* gets a fresh coat of paint with *Frontiers*.

This holiday season, PlayStation 2 owners will get two radically different takes on online role playing. First up is November's ***EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers***, Sony's second console version of the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (we hate the term "MMORPG"), which will use a new graphics engine, have more characters, enemies, and cities, and be easier to learn than the first game. *Frontiers* may yet rival its PC brother's 400,000 active users. Maybe.

We're much more geeked about Sony's other *EverQuest* PS2 game: ***Champions of Norrath***, an action-RPG in the same vein of—and, not surprisingly, developed by the same team behind—last year's *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*. *Norrath* lets you play its full hack-n-slash adventure with up to three other players, either offline with a PS2 Multitap or online through Sony's portal. Expect the sort of gameplay that PC gamers have enjoyed for years with Blizzard's *Diablo* series (and without any of the additional monthly fees that *Frontiers* carries) this November. Hallelujah.

Farther out on the horizon are Square's ***Final Fantasy XI*** for PlayStation 2 and Microsoft's ***True Fantasy Live Online*** for Xbox. Even early next year is a long time to wait for *FFXI*, but American PS2 players will be rewarded with free pack-ins (including Square's Japanese expansion pack, *Rise of the Zilart*) and an online version of *FFIX*'s *Tetra Master* card game. Though keyboard communication is optional, the upcoming PS2 40GB hard drive is required, and there's no offline mode. Meanwhile, Microsoft's online-only MMORPG has no release date, but its lush 3D environments and highly customizable characters are already looking like genre beaters.

7 RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD

We never thought we'd regard zombies as "pretty," but ***Resident Evil Outbreak*** is without question one of the most visually stunning upcoming games for PS2. Plus, it has a brilliant online twist—you cooperate with fellow players to protect each other from swarms of zombies…until they become zombies, and then it's you against them. With four characters (chosen from a pool of eight) who work together to solve puzzles and swap items between themselves, *Outbreak* would be higher on our list, except for some concerns that communication between players is too limited and that the game is essentially the same in offline mode. Your mileage may vary on those issues, but *Outbreak* will also require the PS2 hard drive, which might be a big bite to swallow, even for those who plan on developing a certain "itchy, tasty" hunger for new flesh late this year….

Resident Evil Outbreak has us quoting movie lines like "If you really loved me, you'd let me eat your brains!" and "Send...more...paramedics." Yum.

Yes, we're skeptical about annual game sequels, and yes, there have been quite a few *Tony Hawk* titles in recent years. But ***Tony Hawk's Underground*** lets you put your own face on a character model (by sending a digital picture via e-mail to developer Neversoft) and then explore nine independent 3D worlds full of houses, buildings, streets, and vehicles. You can even can act like Lara Croft, jumping off your skateboard at any time to walk around, jump, and climb on buildings. The only bummer for this October title: Xboxers and GameCubers can't play online, but at least there's still a huge offline game there for them. ➤

Climb rooftops to grind telephone wires (and peek into neighbor's windows) in *Tony Hawk's Underground*.

what about gamecube?

No *Pokémon* online RPG. No online *Mario Tennis* or *Golf*. Nintendo continues to maintain that online games aren't worth its time, so GameCube owners get only the non-online *Mario Kart: Double Dash*—which lets eight people with broadband adapters play over a network (connection nubs)—and few years. *Phantasy Star Online Episode 3: C.A.R.D. Revolution*, a title which even Sega admits is geared mainly toward hardcore PSO fans. Wake up, Nintendo. Even Pikachu thinks your offline-only focus is annoying. (At least that's what someone named Pikachoo666 told us in a chat room.)

Mario Kart Double Dash

Phantasy Star Online Episode 3: C.A.R.D. Revolution

EA SPORTS
MADDEN
NFL 2004

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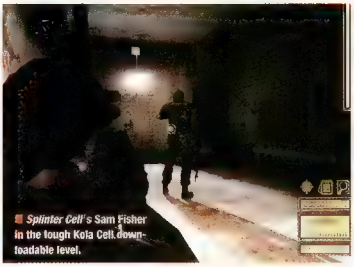
DOWNLOADABLE UPDATES = ONLINE FREEBIES

When's the last time you got a sequel's worth of new features for free? Today, extra levels, characters, costumes, and items are yours for nothing (well, Internet and subscription costs aside) if you're willing to go online to download them. Ubi Soft released a new ***Splinter Cell*** level for Xbox earlier this year, Microsoft's ***MechAssault*** got new mechs and game modes, and ***Counter-Strike*** promises future maps and mods ("modifications" that change the gameplay). And more downloadable freebies are announced each day....



Splinter Cell's Sam Fisher in the tough Kola Cell downloadable level.

MechAssault's new Capture the Flag mode. "Free" to a good home.

Since the *Gran Turismo* series has sold millions of copies, it's safe to say a lot of you are looking forward to *GT4*.

Vi[illegible] Barcelona's *Project Gotham Racing 2*

The *Need for Speed* series gets fast and furious with *Underground*.

Wii Sega rally with its *Gran Turismo*-like *Sega GT Online*?

THEY BUILD DRIVING EXCITEMENT

Gentlemen, start your engines. Four racing games are about to fundamentally change the way console players think about driving. Closest to release are the October-bound Xbox titles, ***Project Gotham Racing 2*** and ***Sega GT Online***, two games that bring familiar elements of past Xbox releases into competitive networked play. *Gotham Racing 2* benefits from a significant visual overhaul while preserving its predecessor's style of gameplay, which rewards you for driving with style and precision. Despite its comparatively bland backgrounds, *Sega GT Online* offers instantly comfortable, intuitive controls and a wider selection of vehicles. Next up to the gate is EA's ***Need for Speed Underground***, a graphically lush driving game focusing on the world of illegal street racing. Though the game will arrive for all three systems in November, PS2 broadband owners will be able to play all of the game's 10 single-player modes with up to three other friends or foes online.

But here's the one racing game everybody can't wait to test-drive: Sony's mammoth online-compatible ***Gran Turismo 4***. Set for early 2004, *GT4* is probably the single most compelling reason for PS2 owners to go broadband. Aside from adding cars that trace the entire history of driving up to today, players can now go online for six-car networked races on new tracks that are practically photo-realistic. Developer Polyphony has pushed the wow factor this time with detailed, fully 3D spectators and pit crews. And with new A.I. and physics engines, *GT4*'s computerized opponents now act more like real-life speed demons.

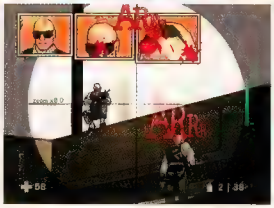
It's hard to drive using this view in *Gran Turismo 4*, but it makes for great screenshots, yes?

The Master Chief takes his new ride out for a spin in *Halo 2*.

SHOOTING WITHOUT SOLDIERING

This category is more about the promise of the future, but what promise it has. In the short term, we have Ubi Soft's cartoon-shaded ***XIII*** (PS2, Xbox, and GC in October) and THQ's darkly futuristic ***Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior*** (PS2 in September)—both of which focus on their single-player games but also carry online multiplayer modes (except *XIII* on GC). Not enough to get you gungho about online combat? Then just wait for Xbox shooter ***Halo 2***, due in early 2004. Microsoft is keeping mum on the game's online features right now, but we assume that the same modes from the original that kept us cramming into Warthog jeeps and Scorpion tanks to battle friends over a LAN connection will be online in the sequel. Anything more than that is icing on the cake, as far as we're concerned.

Also in 2004, Rare will add robust online 4-on-4 deathmatches to an extended version of the raunchy Nintendo 64 platformer *Conker's Bad Fur Day* in ***Conker: Live & Uncut***. Oddball animal characters, heavy weaponry, and controllable vehicles will play key roles in your games of explosive tag. And then we keep hearing about this thing called ***Perfect Dark Zero***....



Above: Expect eye injuries aplenty in *XIII*. Below: The too-dark park that is *Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior*.

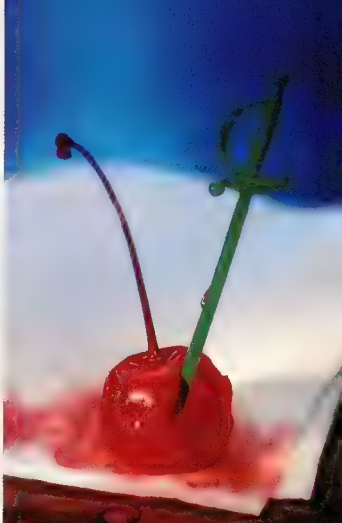
***Madden NFL 2004*. The current reigning champ of foot-ball.**

BEING A GOOD SPORT

***Amped 2* (above) and rival *SSX3* (below).**

You don't need to go online to enjoy the next generation of sports games. But if you sit on the sidelines (wuss), you'll be missing out on some white-hot competition. EA Sports recently announced that PS2 owners will get to play the entire EA lineup online (sorry, Xbox and GameCube fans), as well as have access to downloadable roster updates, tournaments with cash prizes, rankings, matchmaking, and voice-chat support. Xbox owners get exclusive access to XSN Sports, a complete integration of all of Microsoft's sports titles into a single central website that tracks scores, stats, and standings every 15 minutes, then publishes a newspaper-style sports page with updates on user-created leagues.

The companies are betting big on their flagship football games, which are both due out in August (see reviews of ***Madden NFL 2004*** and ***NFL Fever 2004*** on page 124). Each publisher's *other* sports titles have come a long way too, and they will all have online modes this year. Microsoft's ***Amped 2*** (Xbox in October) and EA's ***SSX3*** (PS2, Xbox, and GC in October—online for PS2) look like the best of the bunch. ➤



EVERYTHING IS A BATTLE.

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Shooting strangers has never seemed more appealing than in *SOCOM II* (below), *Rainbow Six 3* (left), and *Counter-Strike* (right).

SEND IN THE SQUADS AND SPIES

Boom. With more than a million copies sold in North America and up to 60,000 players online each day, PS2ers clearly eat up *SOCOM*'s squad-based firefights. ***SOCOM II*** will go a few steps further this November. First, two eight-player teams can face off on all-new maps using dedicated broadband-matching servers. Second, the weapons and Special Ops forces have been expanded, adding Russian Spetnaz and British SAS troops, as well as all sorts of new rocket launchers, guns, and items to use in calling in air strikes. Finally, interactive vehicles and machines play an added role, as does voice communication before and during gameplay. With 12 single-player missions and 22 online missions, will you really want to play alone?

Not to be outdone, Xbox will have both Valve's ***Counter-Strike*** and Ubi Soft's ***Rainbow Six 3*** ready for the holidays. Players command *Rainbow Six 3*'s four-person squads in gritty, realistic close quarters, using team members to draw fire, set up ambushes, and take command of rooms. *Counter-Strike* has all of the gunfire and features 16-player games and mission objectives requiring gadgets from blowtorches to fiber-optic cameras.

Two titles slated for next year also deserve your attention. Details are scant on the newly announced ***Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow***, but Sam Fisher's cell will definitely expand to include multiplayer online missions. And Sony's ***Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain*** revisits familiar territory, adding dozens of new weapons and the ability to play missions cooperatively on broadband with up to three other people.

Above: Sneak around online in *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*.
Below: Up close and personal in *Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain*.

making the online jump

Here are a few extra facts you'll want to know before taking the plunge:

Currently priced at $49.95 for one year of access, Microsoft's Xbox Live Starter Kit with Voice Communicator headset and demo games will see a price jump to $69.95 (or $5.99/month) this fall. 1st year renewal will cost you $49.95 and the headset will be available separately for $29.99.) You also need broadband Internet service in order to connect.

Available for $39.99, Sony's PS2 Network Adapter is also found in a new PS2 bundle for a combined price of $199.99. Though there is no annual fee for PS2 online service, you'll still need your own dial-up or broadband Internet service to connect.

A USB headset will be available for $29.99, but no price has been announced for the PS2 hard drive. Besides cost, software is also a consideration. Microsoft's Xbox Live service has an early lead due to a number of strong titles, but Sony has *SOCOM II*, *Final Fantasy XI* and *Gran Turismo 4* just around the corner. Which service is right for you? We suggest you look at the lineups and costs involved. And then make up your own damn mind.

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review crew

Your monthly guide to gaming's winners and losers

THE RATING SYSTEM

Each reviewer assigns an overall grade to each game, on a scale from 0 to 10. When a game receives a 10, you can rest assured that it's one of the best games ever made, a classic that will endure throughout the ages. Conversely, when a game gets a 0.0, it's complete and utter crap and should be treated like a deadly biohazard. We utilize the entire scale, so a game that gets a 5.0 is average, not bad. We repeat: 5.0 IS AVERAGE. The scores are color-coded, so the brighter the reds, the better the game.

OUR AWARDS

Platinum Awards go to games that get all 10s, the ultimate review a game can get.

Gold Awards go to games with an average score of 9.0 or higher. Quality stuff.

Silver Awards go to games that average at least an 8.0 (but are lower than 9.0).

This honor is bestowed upon the highest-reviewed game each month. A worthy buy.

This dishon- or goes to the worst game each month that gets unanimously bad scores.

ESRB KEY (Also check out www.esrb.com)

EC-Early Childhood: Games bearing this mark are suited for infants, toddlers, and Seanbaby.

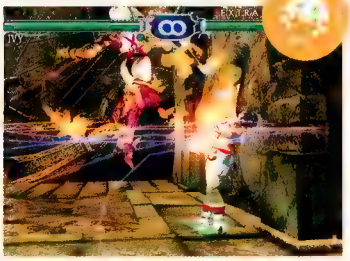
E-Everyone: Wholesome fun for the whole family, devoid of hookers, head-shots, or heroin use.

T-Teen: Like PG-13 movies, Teen games feature mild violence and "comic mischief."

M-Mature: Whereas these games offer all the gore, sex, drugs, and fun of R-rated fare.

AO-Adults Only: A rare find. We haven't seen an AO game since *Neuromancer* on the 3DO.

GAME OF THE MONTH



■ PAGE 103

SOUL CALIBUR II

Our cover subject fended off fierce competition from excellent games like *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution*, *Madden NFL 2004*, and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* to be this month's champ.

directory

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The Story

Fighting games always have some sort of tenuous story to explain why all these people decided to beat the other—but if we gamers really needed a reason, *Soul Calibur II*'s tale is even more convoluted than usual. All the fuss is over a pair of sentient, evil blades called Soul Edge; everybody either wants them or wants to destroy them. One of the Soul Edge swords has already been shattered, though the tainted shards still emanate a fearful power. The game's opening movie and the character-specific endings reveal a bit about each fighter's motivation, but for the full story, you'll need to unlock their profiles in the game.

Beginner's guide to basic combat techniques (Part One)

Weapon Stripping — Not to be confused with parrying, *SC2*'s weapon stripping system lets you turn the tables on an opponent's offense with ordinary moves.

Eight-Way Run — Stilted sidestepping is so passé. By comparison, *Soul Calibur*'s freedom to move in any direction is nothing less than revolutionary.

Air Control — Dreaded juggle combos don't guarantee a miserable death. Air control lets you shift your weight in mid-air, and out of alignment of your enemy's chopper.

Hey, do those pumps come in a size 7?

PS2, Xbox, GC

SOUL CALIBUR II

Time to fall in love with fighting games again

GAME OF THE MONTH

Good: Incredible graphics and weapons-based gameplay
Bad: Single-player game not as deep as *Virtua Fighter 4*'s
Seems good, but it's actually bad: Having different fighters in different versions. We want to play Link versus Spawn

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.soulcalibur.com
www.soulcalibur2.com

The U.S. versions of 3D fighter *Soul Calibur II* have been stunting productivity in our offices since June—pretty soon, you're gonna be just as screwed as we are. Because there are some games you play when you can find the time, and then there are games you rearrange your life around. *Soul Calibur II* is the latter. So clear your schedule; you've got a can't-miss appointment with an undead pirate, a busty ninja, and a weirdo dressed with lots of flair.

When the original *Soul Calibur* came out on Sega Dreamcast, it was the best fighting game we'd ever played—and we're not qualifying that with an "arguably," because there was no argument (almost four years later, only *Virtua Fighter 4* and *VF4: Evo*—see page 115—can compare). *Calibur* was a huge step forward from its predecessor, *Soul Blade*, and not just because it looked beautiful; it was amazingly deep, especially for a weapons-based fighting game. Unfortunately, Dreamcast's early demise (and the dying arcade scene) meant that most gamers never got to train with *Soul Calibur*.

But now, for the one guy out there who didn't already know, *Soul Calibur II* is coming to all three consoles (each version has minor differences and an exclusive character—see pg. 104 for details). Take the phone off the hook and put out the "do not disturb" sign—the wait is finally over. Our souls, at least, still burn. Can't speak for yours.

The Reviews
(and a bit of follow-up discussion)

SHAWN: Screw it, I'll say the unspeakable: When this swordslinger stepped onto the scene, it eviscerated all comers, *Virtua Fighter 4* included, and squatted to drop a deuce on their headstones. *Soul Calibur II* became my sensei overnight, and I've been abusing buttons ever since.

With this sequel, Namco chose to refine its previous work rather than rethink the series' already superb design. *SC2* is anything but a lamp-heated rehash of last generation's leftovers (and not only because many of you missed *Cali*'s debut). This fighter's been training in secret for years and emerges from its sword school a leaner, faster, more lethal samurai, subtly improved in most every aspect.

Anyone can appreciate *SC2*'s unmatched visual polish. And the screenshots you've been staring at all summer only hint at this baby's breathtaking beauty. You've seen the flashes that follow blades as they arc through the air. You've studied the stills of elegant arenas where sunlight filters through stained glass, curves around columns of cold marble, and kisses Ivy's perfect breasts. ➤

The Soul Edge

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? One title, three different versions. Here's what's happening with them

PLAYSTATION 2

Exclusive Character: Heihachi. He joins the "we're so cool, we're in two Namco fighting games" club with fellow *Tekken* cast member Yoshimitsu (who was in *Soul Calibur 1*).

Controller: The PS2's controller works rather well, with a responsive D-pad and well-placed buttons.

Graphics: This version has the worst graphics of the bunch, with choppy slowdown when the sparks start flying.

What else? The load times on PS2 aren't too hot. Maybe old man Heihachi can teach us the virtues of patience....

XBOX

Exclusive Character: Spawn, from the comic books. Let's not speak of the movie.

Controller: You will hate this game on the original Controller F ("fatty"). Those awkwardly placed buttons just don't work here. But the newer Controller S is great. Some of us prefer it to the PS2 controller.

Graphics: The best. This version supports the highest resolutions for HDTV and also kicks slowdown to the curb.

What else? The load times are much faster than on PS2.

GAMECUBE

Exclusive Character: Link, from Nintendo's *Zelda* series. He's the most well-known character of this exclusive bunch (to us gaming geeks, that is).

Controller: Unless you really like pounding on one button more than the others (and if you want to play this game well, you won't), the GC controller is the least comfortable (along with Xbox's Controller Fatty). The diminutive D-pad only makes things worse.

Graphics: Better than PS2's, with no slowdown, but it doesn't get as crispy-sharp as Xbox's in high resolutions.

What else? The load times are much faster than on the PlayStation 2.

But it's what you haven't seen that'll really blow you away. The animation is unbelievable. It's fast and fluid, making even over-the-top moves seem totally convincing. Watching a petite Talim deflect a blow from Astaroth's king-sized ax and stagger clear across the stage under a shower of sparks is all the proof you need.

SHANE: Namco's strategy of refinement carries over to *Soul Calibur II*'s roster of characters as well. Series fans will be thrilled to see their favorite duelists back in action (sultry dominatrix Ivy's chain-whip punishments never looked so sexy, and gimpy Voldo's undulations are more disturbing than ever). Most of the returning characters pack new moves, combos, and stances, and the whole group has been rebalanced to weed out any unfairness. If you're new to the *Calibur* club, you'll be immediately impressed—this series has always been about stylish guys and gals wielding impressive weapons, and it's a blast just to explore the intricacies of each available avatar. Sure, the fighting styles are fanciful, but these magically delicious maneuvers look so damn cool that you likely won't obsess over the lack of martial arts feasibility.

If you're a series vet like me, however, you'll probably be a tinge disappointed by the lack of fresh faces. Although each console's version of *SC2* offers a total of 23 characters (once you've unlocked all the secret ones), realistically only three of them are fundamentally new: prissy fencer Raphael, sprightly tonfa babe Talim, and each system's exclusive character (see above). Of those three bonus dudes, Link and Spawn fit in the best—each has a nifty blend of special moves that seem right at home in the *Calibur* realm. *Tekken*'s Heihachi, however, is a sad old man whose pathetic punches have no place in a weapon-based fighter. The other new dudes, Cassandra, Necrid, Yunsung, and Charade, are all loosely based on pre-existing characters and movesets from the older games. Still, the total number of characters is sufficiently massive and the variety wide, so I can't complain that much.

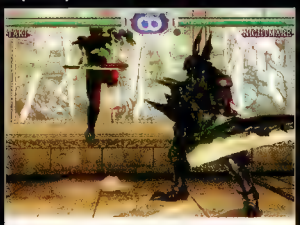
SHOE: *Soul Calibur II* is simply amazing. Fighting-game newcomers will marvel at its incredibly detailed graphics and sound effects—when you see a foe crumple over in pain, or you hear the sharp twang of swords clashing, you'll know you're in for a mind-blowing technological treat. Casual types will also dig how easy this game is to play: Fancy-looking attacks and throws are only a few simple button presses away.

At the same time, *SC2* is a hardcore gamer's fantasy game come true. With Eight-Way Run,

SOUL WINNER
Shawn: No slowdown, sharper visuals and a better-playing bonus character make the Xbox version a no-brainer. And if, like me, you prefer control pads to arcade sticks, you'll find GC's setup unusable next to the Xbox's Controller S.

Beginner's guide to basic combat techniques (Part Two)

Ring-Outs — When you find yourself backed up against the bottomless abyss, it's no accident. Someone fought hard to put you there, and unless your evading, guard impacting, and air control skills are up to snuff, you'll pay with your life (or, at least, lose a round).



Wall Attacks — All fighters can shepherd foes into corners to dish out additional damage. A few, however, have special attacks, executable only with the aid of a wall. Although they're not catalogued in the moves lists, experimentation might just yield surprises....

Guard Impact — In place of canned reversals, *Soul Calibur II*'s guard impacts let all characters clash swords to parry or repel attacks. Performing one is simplicity itself—just press back or forward and tap block—but pulling it off takes precise timing.

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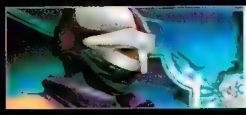
U.S.A.: 23, JAPAN: 20

U.S. wins with three bonus characters

The U.S. releases of *Soul Calibur II* will see three more fighters than their Japanese counterparts, all based on characters from the first *Soul Calibur*. Unfortunately, they come looking a bit unprepared for battle: They don't have in-game moves lists, and you can't even play them in single-player modes like Arcade or Weapon Master.

Berserker
A gigantic bruiser with a big ax, modeled after *SC1*'s Rock



Assassin
A turban-wearing ninja with a Chinese sword (remember Hwang?)

Lizardman
A...man-lizard, straight from the last game, with a rainbow of new skins

➤ Air Control, Guard Impacts, and all these other techniques in your holster, you can spend weeks training with just one character. I've played my share of fighting games, believe you me, and none of them has come close to the depth *SC2* has.

This versatility, however, is perhaps *SC2*'s biggest weakness. Naturally, fighting games are meant to be played with friends, and if you don't have an opponent of your skill level, you won't enjoy the melees, no matter how good they look. Shawn and I, for example, have played so much that we're incorporating mind games into the mix: psych-outs, delayed moves, canceled attacks.... But if we pulled any of that business on a casual player, we'd be sending him home crying for his *Mortal Kombat 1*. You definitely gain an infinite amount of appreciation for this game if you and your opponent-friends grow into it at the same pace and experience levels.

SHAWN: So is *Soul Calibur II* for you solitary types? Well, its Weapon Master mode spices up solo play with a series of duels fought in special circumstances, and it rewards your troubles with a trove of unlockable treasures, including 10 additional weapons for each warrior. Equipping the latter not only makes you look sharp (check out Voldo's hedge clippers or Astaroth's ornate choppers), but it also enhances your attacks. None of it can replace flesh-and-blood sparring partners, but it's a nice bonus.

On the other hand, I agree with Shoe; *SC2* isn't meant to be played strictly solo anymore than chess is, but like that paragon of deep gaming, it's no less brilliant for the loss. And thankfully, this fighter differs a bit from other hardcore brawlers in that beginners can have a blast, too. Even if, off the bat, you're not the best samurai to draw a sword, you'll be determined to become one.

SHANE: I'm not overly impressed by *SC2*'s single-player game. Versus mode never gets old, but I don't always have dorks like Shoe and Shawn around to challenge. The Weapon Master stuff offers unlocking thrills for a few hours, but it's over way too quickly, and it's too simple to open up all the stuff with little effort. I sincerely wish that *SC2* had taken a page from *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution*'s Quest mode—not only can you customize your characters with more than 1,500 unique accessories, but you can also fight insanely tough A.I. opponents based on Japan's best tournament players. Limitless challenge and discovery are sorely lacking in *Calibur*.

SIDE: Sure, *VF4* may have the superior single-player mode, but *SC2* still beats most fighting games in the solo-play department. It doesn't really matter anyway. *SC2* can stand on its ➤

SOUL WINNER
Shane: My money's on the Cube version. Link is fun to play—nothing beats tossing bombs and shooting arrows with our elfin pal. Sure, the GC controller takes a little getting used to, but hey, real men use joysticks anyway.

House Rules

It's safe to say you'll never tire of straight-up showdowns, but giving the rules a clever tweak or two never hurt anybody. Try these for a break from the tried and true:

Loser's Gambit

When you've been beaten within an inch of your life, a wager offers the option of dying with dignity instead of being carved up on the floor like a cockroach. Once called, your opponent lets you put your back to the abyss before staging his final charge. With you teetering on the edge of the ring, the odds are in his favor, but with a little skill and twice the luck, you might just pull an ace from your ass and claim unlikely victory. Block low if he slide-tackles and toss him over your shoulder. The key to reversing your fortunes is blocking or evading the charge.

King of the Hill

Set your health bars for invulnerability and select a small stage, unbounded by walls, so only ring-outs score. Success requires finely tuned strategy—you must know precisely where each attack and throw pushes your opponent, rather than relying on dumb luck. If, like editor Shane Bettenhausen, you're the sorry sort who cries foul when you're tossed out of the arena, there's no better way to man up to your weakness. Alternately, by selecting completely enclosed stages, you can work on quadrupling your combo counts with well-timed wall attacks.

Against All Odds

In the unlockable Extra Versus Team Battle mode, player one picks one character along with his or her healing blade (e.g., Xianghua's Krita-Yuga). Player two gets three or more characters, but must use only parasitic weapons such as Voldo's Tofana Scissors or Mitsurugi's Gassan. Even with superior numbers, the fighter with the tainted swords must strike to kill before his cursed blades sate their appetite for energy on his own soul. The same setup is also a nifty handicap for skilled contenders in search of a stiffer challenge.

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(Above) Dominatrix Ivy likes her girls face down, ass-up. (Below) Taki evicts Yunsung from the arena with a pushy, blade-twirling combo.

BECOME A WEAPON MASTER

A bevy of unlockable blades livens up solo play

Odds are that you won't always have a friend/loved one/random stranger to battle in *Soul Calibur II*'s awesomely addictive Versus mode, so you'll likely be stuck clashing souls solo.

Realistically, the Arcade mode will only hold your interest for so long—eight quick matches, a fight with boss Inferno, and it's over. Luckily, there's a whole other single-player experience that's incredibly rewarding: Weapon Master mode.

Here, you make your way across a simple map fighting special events to win coffers of cash and fabulous prizes. Each match features a clever concept that mixes up the traditional swordplay; examples include fights where you're poisoned, battles among landmines, and tense melees where a gust of wind could toss you out of the ring. You'll also encounter "dungeon" areas that are a bit of a drag—no exploration, no mystery, just a succession of normal matches accessed from a dungeon map.

Fighting through the various stages, but spending your prize money on fabulous unlockables makes it even more worthwhile. Alternate costumes, art galleries, special weapons, and a bevy of extra modes are yours for the taking. The weapons are especially cool, as many have unique properties, like increased attack power or the ability to heal you. Be sure to snag each character's snicker-worthy final special weapon—seeing Link swat fools with a butterfly net, Seung Mina bust out a broom, or Voldo shake a mean tambourine is pure comedy gold. Plus, you can use these zany weapons in the unlockable Extra Versus mode.

Overall, while the victory spoils definitely impress, Weapon Master mode is too easy to offer long-term challenge. Dedicated players will unlock everything in one hefty session, especially if they exploit challenges like Chapter Nine's second stage (where you win a whopping 30,000 Gold) by playing it over and over.

The dungeons are a bit dull.

Versus game alone—it's that good. It's beautiful, it's deep, and it offers many characters that play so differently from each other.

SHANE: Yes, I agree with you guys that this is an extraordinary game that no fighting fan should miss, but I'm not blind to its imperfections. The visuals and music both let me down a bit. Back when *Soul Calibur* hit the scene, its graphics obliterated everything seen before. *SC2* looks perfectly fine, but it doesn't really impress. Sorry. Plus, the stage designs piss me off—many stages are either too small (instantaneous ring-outs aren't much fun) or too big and empty.

My beef with the music is that it's all too slow. These sweeping romantic tunes would work well for some epic film about doomed lovers in feudal Japan, but they hardly get my blood pumping in the ring. But hey, don't get the impression that I'm a hater. I truly love *Soul Calibur II*...I'm just being realistic here.

SHAWN: If there's a sharper-looking console game than *SC2*, I haven't seen it. Although the new arenas lack the ambitious scale of, say, *Dead or Alive 3*, they're anything but flawed. Small stages keep tactical players sharp—a thorough grasp of evasive techniques can and will save you from ring-outs—and the larger levels give newbies a needed break. What's wrong with that?

SHOE: Regardless, the gameplay is absolutely killer. It's so well balanced and finely tuned that you will definitely appreciate it more and more the longer you play. Each seemingly cheap move or combo has a perfectly accessible counter, so this game really lets you show off your skills. Astaroth's powerful throws got you down? Escape them. Taki's lightning-quick combos too fast? Interrupt them. Kilik's long staff keeping you at bay? Walk (or rather, eight-way run) around it. You get the idea.

SHANE: Ultimately, this is a game that you should run out and buy, especially if you have someone around who's willing to go the distance with you in Versus mode. It'll undoubtedly keep you up till 3 a.m. crying "uno mas" in bleary-eyed splendor for a few months after release. Will it be your favorite fighting game of all time? Maybe, maybe not. In any case, it's a keeper.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHAWN	SHANE	SHOE
10	9.0	10

SOUL WINNER

Shoe: I'll be buying the Xbox version, thank you. I like Link and Spawn better than Heihachi (whose short range and *Tekken*-style of play don't fit as well in the *Soul Calibur* arena) but the Xbox Controller S edges out the GameCube pad.

You've Played Too Much Soul Calibur When...

Yunsung kicks ass, fishing style.

Translation: You need to get out more.

The popular Japanese gaming magazine *Famitsu* asks readers to send in proof of their spectacular gaming feats. One very creative reader (who obviously has way too much time on his hands) sent in a stunning clip in which he beats the original Dreamcast *Soul Calibur* on the Ultra Hard difficulty setting...with Sega's fishing controller. And we're not talking about the buttons on the controller. Nope, this guy uses just the motion-sensing casting power—moving the rod up and down performs a vertical slash while swaying it from side to side executes a horizontal slash. Oh, and no blocking, of course. He plays as pirate Cervantes, and dies a few times before reaching Inferno, but ultimately succeeds (and even scores a few Perfect victories). Quite impressive.

So, if any of you guys have any bizarre ideas to show us your insane *SC2* abilities, by all means send them in. Suggestions include: Beating *SC2* with a mouse, a dance pad, or maybe a DVD remote. Good luck.

"Barbara, cancel my appointments, hold all my calls. *Soul Calibur II* just arrived." If you're a captain of industry with an executive assistant named Barbara, you may be uttering this phrase in the near future.

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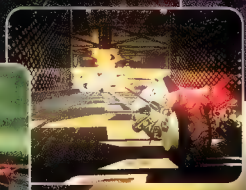

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Language
Mild Violence

PlayStation®2

acclaim.com/games/xgra

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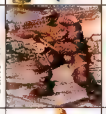
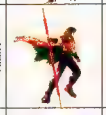
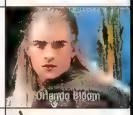
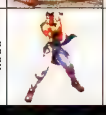
SOUL CALIBUR II ROSTER

Think of this as a social meet-and-greet, except with the *Soul Calibur II* characters. And when you start to feel awkward and uncomfortable, you can just turn the page rather than stand around looking desperate and drinking like a fish.

		CHARACTER BIO	FIGHTING STYLE	FAVORED BY	NEMESIS	DAY JOB
ASSASSIN*		Sword-wielding Assassin is one of the three extra characters that weren't in the Japanese version of the game. He's unlockable through Weapon Master mode, and plays just like Hwang from the last *Calibur*, and very similar to Yunsung.	Assassin is best suited to medium and short range combat. He needs to press the attack aggressively, showering his foe with a flurry of sword slashes mixed up with the occasional throw. He's short on low-striking moves.	Forlorn Hwang fans	Ivy, Nightmare	Lawrence of Arabia
ASTAROTH		A golem created by a cult devoted to Aries (the Greek god of war), axe-wielding Astaroth was destroyed by the fey pirate Maxi, of all people. Except he wasn't, because his body regenerated four years later. Golems! Can't trust 'em!	Big, slow, but devastating, in the hands of a skilled player, Astaroth is just plain scary. That axe has a huge range, and his throws are the best in the game, making him equally dangerous up close.	Ring-out artists, gym rats, Dan "Shoe" Hsu	Mitsurugi, Taki, Raphael	Children's day care manager
BERSERKER*		As one of other additional characters not in the Japanese version, the big and burly Berserker is really the last *Calibur*'s Rock in disguise, all done up in shiny gladiator gear. But he's still got that impossibly large battle axe.	Berserker is very similar to Astaroth; a powerful, brutish fighter with long range. He's a bit quicker than Astaroth, and though his throws aren't as damaging, they're still the second best in the game. Not a character for beginners.	Rock mavens	Taki, Raphael	High school guidance counselor
CASSANDRA		With older sister Sophitia all domesticated with a husband, kids, and house full of Ikea furniture, Cassandra took up the family sword and shield this time around. She aims to destroy the Soul Edge for good.	Cassandra's very similar to her sister, but not very beginner-friendly. Her attacks are powerful and fairly quick, but can be difficult to string together effectively. She has fewer juggle moves than Soph.	Desperate fans of panty shots	Just about everyone	President of the Honor Society
CERVANTES*		Fancy-pants pirate Cervantes was a slave to the original Soul Edge blades—until one of the two swords was shattered, killing him in the process. The sword shards still held power, though, and Cervantes rose from the dead. Then probably said, "Arrrr."	The zombie pirate doesn't dominate quite as easily as he did in *Soul Calibur* (DC), but he's still very potent with his twin blades. While his speed is only moderate, he's got good high/low combos and many ground attacks.	Cervantes fans from the Dreamcast *Calibur* game, pirate connoisseurs	Astaroth, Raphael	Animatronic pirate in Disney's "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride
HEIHACHI		Granddaddy of the *Tekken* fighting game series and the exclusive character for PS2 players, Heihachi is bent on world domination and the relentless pursuit of powerful hair-styling products. And he probably wants the Soul Edge, too.	As the only warrior without a weapon, Heihachi's a very close-range fighter. His strikes and combos make up for it by inflicting huge amounts of damage, though. *Tekken* masters will be glad to know his 10-hit combos still work.	*Tekken* experts only	Any fighter with a long-range, "keep away" style	Titan of industry, effeminate hairstylist
IVY		Both Ivy's biological father and her adoptive parents were twisted and killed by Soul Edge's power. Ivy seeks not merely to destroy the sword, but to executing anyone tainted by it, including herself. So she's a glass-half-empty sort of gal.	Ivy's fighting style relies on keeping foes at bay with her whip-like sword's enormous range. She has several different stances and the two most powerful throws in the game. Difficult but very satisfying to master.	Keep-away experts, lingerie lovers	Taki, Yunsung, Raphael	Frederick's of Hollywood model
KILIK		When he heard that the Soul Edge still existed, Kilik hatched a risky plan to absorb all its power with his sacred staff and purge himself of its corruption over a lifetime. For much-needed recreation, he enjoys pole-vaulting and the limbo.	Kilik combines long reach with nimble acrobatics. His speed and strength are about average, but his throws pack a wallop (he's got a few new ones, too). He's a good character for beginners and skilled players alike.	Aggressive players, ring-out artists	Cervantes, Voldo	Drum major
LINK		This elf has kicked Ganon(dorf)'s ass so many times, we've lost count. When he's not collecting Triforce shards or hunting down magical musical instruments, he stays home and makes sweet, sweet love to Zelda.	Whatever gets the job done. In addition to his shield and the trusty Master Sword, Link has bombs, a boomerang, and a cute little archery set. He's not above chucking opponents right out of the ring with his throws, either.	Nintendo fanboys, Shane Bettenhausen. Or is that redundant?	Nightmare, Astaroth	 Orlando Bloom
LIZARDMAN*		Lizardman was a human named Aeon and servant of the god Hephaestus, until an evil priest enslaved him and turned him into a newt…uh, a lizard man. He's now a mission to—what else?—get his claws on the Soul Edge.	Like Sophitia, Lizardman fights with a short sword and a shield, but he's stronger, faster, and has better ring-out moves. A relatively weak thrower, Liz's advantage lies in exploiting his many juggling combos.	Newbies, people who want the trash-talk factor—"I served you with Lizzie!"	Show-offs (Voldo, Talim)	That guy from *Brute Force*
MAXI		By defeating Astaroth, Maxi avenged his murdered pirate crew, but was crippled in the fight. Alas, the golem lives! Maxi found a healer to restore his body, but in the process he lost the memory of his old companions, Kilik and Xianghua.	Maxi is a fast attacker with his nun-chakus, but he can be difficult to rein in once he has started an offensive run. In the hands of a skillful player he's very dangerous, though, with wicked combos.	Button-mashers, and, ironically, many top-tier players	Astaroth	Vegas-era Elvis impersonator

		CHARACTER BIO	FIGHTING STYLE	FAVORED BY	NEMESIS	DAY JOB
MITSURUGI		Mitsurugi was a feared mercenary—at least until the introduction of rifles changed the battlefield and made his traditional fighting skills obsolete. Now he seeks the power of the Soul Edge to give those pesky riflemen whatfor.	Mitsurugi is most effective when played aggressively, pressing the attack with his katana whenever possible. He has a couple of alternate stances, a potent, unblockable low attack, and dangerous juggle moves.	Beginners, button mashers	Taki, Ivy	Sushi chef
NECRID		Necrid sprung fully formed from the imagination of Spawn-creator Todd McFarlane and into *Soul Calibur II*. Oh, you want the official line? Something about the Soul Edge corrupting a warrior, yadda yadda here's Necrid.	Necrid's a brute, but he's a reasonably quick brute. And he's got the ability to mimic some of the best moves, and weapons, from other characters—which makes him absolutely deadly in the hands of an expert...and kinda cheap.	McFarlane sycophants	Taki, gamers who point and laugh at his ugliness	Stenographer
NIGHTMARE		Nightmare sought and eventually found the Soul Edge. But one three-year killing spree later, the Soul Edge was badly damaged in a battle with Xinghua and Kilik. Nightmare helped the sword regain its power...and fell deeper under its thrall.	He's one of the slower characters, but his devastating damage and variety of high/low combos make him more than a match for anyone. 'Mare can easily keep foes at a distance, while his large throw range help him get out of trouble.	Cerebral fighters, those afflicted with big-sword envy	Xinghua, Kilik	Insurance adjuster
RAPHAEL		A French nobleman on the lam, Raphael is devoted to protecting a 10-year-old girl. His plan? Get the Soul Edge, give it to the aristocrats, and watch as they destroy each other. Doesn't make much sense, but hey, he wears a dickie. Don't argue.	Raph's rapier is amazingly quick, and he's most effective when on the all-out offensive—making him a beginner's favorite. There's a lot to learn about Raphael though; he's got a couple of key parry and sidestep moves.	French people, newbies	Nightmare, Taki, Voldo	*Iron Chef*'s Chairman Kaga
SEUNG MINA*		Mina planned to bring Yunsung and White Storm, the sword she lent him, back to her family's Seung dojo. Or at least that's what she told her poor, trusting pops—naturally, she's really after the Soul Edge.	She and Kilik are quite similar, although her strikes are both faster and weaker in terms of damage. She can hit opponents from quite long range with her glaive, but Mina's real plus is her sheer variety of moves. Tough to master.	Halter-top mavens, old school *Soul Edge* (arcade) players	Astaroth, Nightmare, Taki	Denny's hostess
SOPHITIA*		Bare footed and doting over her brood of ankle-biters, Sophitia happily hung up her shield after the first *Cali*. But when a Soul Edge fragment sent her rugrats into a rage, she followed her sister Cassandra on a quest to break the sword's curse.	A high priestess of pop-ups and pounces, Soph excels at offense and has a wide assortment of juggle combos. She's beginner-friendly, but sometimes predictable. Like her sis and Lizardman, she wields a short sword.	Art historians	Deceptive foes like Voldo and Seung Mina	Caesar's Palace cocktail waitress
SPAWN		Whose back stories bite the most—characters in games or comics? As a black man who became a demon who became a white man who became a demon again, Spawn settles the dispute. Oh, and now he wants the Soul Edge.	Surprisingly, even with his fire-ball-like necroplasm and levitation powers, Spawn's no scrub. His hand axe has a solid assortment of deceptive high and low attacks, but his throw range is short.	Casual comic book fans, Todd McFarlane worshippers	Speedy, sprightly characters like Talim and Taki	Second-tier superhero
TAKI		After swabbing the deck with sea dog Cervantes, Taki fused a shard of his saber into her own sword. But when she saw its wicked aura corrupt her former sensei, she promptly augmented her bustline and set out to fetch the remaining pieces.	Always in your face (in more ways than one), Taki severs tendons and slices throats at the speed of sound—even those love kegs can't slow this acrobatic assassin down. Her extreme mobility makes her a constant threat.	Ninja fetishists, Shawn Elliott	Turtling scrubs and slow moving smack-down artists who prefer to fight from afar.	Jumpsuit saleswoman
TALIM		The Last Priestess of the Wind—so called for her ability to communicate with the elements—immediately sensed evil when a shard of Soul Edge arrived on her island. She now seeks to restore the shards to their rightful place. Or something.	With her bladed tonfas, Talim's a deadly dervish, second only to Taki in sheer speed. And while she lacks the latter character's limitless combos, her auto-evade stance makes for unmatched mind games.	Greenpeace activists	Taki, Raphael, mean people	Humane Society volunteer
VOLDO		Voldo ran a funhouse with a traveling carnival, cooking crystallized meth behind its cloistered walls. Blinded when his drug kitchen blew sky-high, he seeks the shyster who sold him the unstable recipe. Or, maybe he's looking for the Soul Edge.	*Soul Calibur*'s sightless sadist might not know back from front, but he knows how to use his bladed claws. Even when prone, he's a squirming snake best approached with caution (and a chastity belt). Very unpredictable.	Latex aficionados	Nightmare	Hotel doorman
XIANGHUA		Xianghua (wielding Soul Calibur, the "good" counterpart to Soul Edge) and Kilik battled Nightmare, breaking—but not destroying—Soul Edge. Years later, she found a fragment of the evil sword, and then set out to destroy them all.	Xianghua is a very quick, but her attacks are relatively weak, even more so than in the previous game. She has a wide range of cancel and feint moves, so she's great for getting in your opponent's head.	Guys who have a thing for Chun Li	Nightmare, Astaroth, Berserker	Waitress at Tchotchke's
YOSHIMITSU*		The last surviving warrior of a massacred clan, Yoshi once sought the fabled sword to exact his revenge. Later curbing his bloodlust, he devoted his life to saving the weak, until learning of the evil Soul Edge's continued existence.	*Tekken*'s robotic ronin strikes like a normal samurai until he looses a screw and gets all suicidal. Some of his sword moves are borrowed from Mitsurugi. His main weakness: not enough high/low variety in his combos.	Unrepentant *Tekken* junkies, robots	Ivy, Kilik, Seung Mina	Civil War re-enactor
YUNSUNG		A student of the Seung dojo (like *Soul Calibur*'s Hwang), the brash Yunsung wields White Storm, a sword lent to him by Seung Mina. He seeks the Soul Edge in order to impress Hwang, and ultimately challenge the older fighter.	Quick and acrobatic, Yunsung has a variety of strong kick moves to back up his fancy sword work. He specializes in medium to close combat, keeping his opponent on the defensive with a barrage of fast strikes.	Hotheaded young bucks with something to prove	Ivy, Nightmare	Jazzercise instructor

(* Unlockable characters)

Experience comedy that could make Carrot Top cringe.

Xbox / Also on: PS2, GC

FREAKY FLYERS

More like Gimpy Gliders

For the full *FF* experience, sing along: "Operation Midway—shoot those flying monkeys!"

Good: Solid controls
Bad: Slow, uneventful races
The Music: Lord, make it stop

SHAWN: When kart racers take to the skies, they lose a lot of what makes the genre fun in the first place. Careening around corners, building speed to clear chasms, skidding past obstacles—it's a bit much to sacrifice for the dubious distinction of not being just another *Mario Kart* clone. So, while *Freaky Flyers* is unique, it's not particularly recommendable. What the game needs most are more subtleties to master and more thrills per minute, since all you do is fly over almost everything and shoot what's in front of you.

I'd like to applaud the responsive controls, as well as the vibrant yet perfunctory levels, such as pirate hideaways and arctic wastelands—but there's no denying how pitifully generic it all feels. And rather than offering a cast of endearing cartoon mascots, *FF* settles for potentially offensive parodies of people from around the world (Engrish-speaking Sammy Wasabi, Tracy Torpedoes the Teutonic sadist, etc.), thus spoiling the game's potential even as a decent pacifier for the bib-and-cradle set.

PAUL: Here's a racing game that won't let you race. Your opponents are racing, sure—but you're hobbled by a speed handicap, so you must unlock shortcuts by wrestling with the superfluous, eye-straining flotsam that saturates every course. Ghosts, pirate ships, giant snakes, voodoo dolls, and a huge monkey statue fight for attention in just one level! Couldn't we trade these asinine obstacles for some kind of powerslide maneuver? Or a turbo boost? Or weapons that don't suck? In other words, how about some *gameplay*?

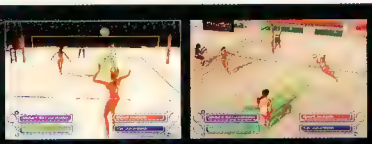
CRISPIN: I can give you lots of reasons you'd never want to take to *Freaky Flyers*' skies. The levels—although imaginative and full of shortcuts—are often confusing and take maddening trial and error to figure out. Opponents cheat to stay ahead. And, like Shawn says, the whole thing feels like a generic airborne kart racer. But all you really need to know is this: If anyone ever caught you playing this game and heard its so-bad-it's-not-even-good music, it would replace that time you got the porno tape stuck in your parents' VCR as the most embarrassing moment of your life.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHAWN	PAUL	CRISPIN
5.0	3.0	1.0

Publisher: Midway
Developer: Midway
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.freakyflyers.com



It's not quite as pretty as some other v-ball titles, but the gameplay's surprisingly solid.

PS2 / Also On: None

SUMMER HEAT BEACH VOLLEYBALL

When did slutty volleyball become a genre?

Don't let the alluring billboard for *Turok: Evolution* distract you from making a crucial dive.

Good: Pick-up-and-play controls
Bad: Unreliable computer-controlled teammates
Don't Play As: Men with mullets

SHAWN: Last winter, *Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*'s sweat-sheened lasses warmed Xbox fans' hearts, leaving envious PS2 owners out in the cold. The good news is that Acclaim has finally found a surrogate to sate your desire—only she's a bit on the homely side. *Summer Heat* isn't exactly pretty—she has the plastic luster and improbable proportions of a dime-store Barbie knockoff, and the static beaches she frequents appear to be located in Dullsville. Neither is *Heat* big on extraneous *DOA*-style fluff like sun worship, slot machines, or shopping sprees—although she will indulge you with a few unlockable swimsuits and music video clips from her crummy CD collection. But for all the T&A trappings, this gal is actually talented at her titular sport. The controls are simple yet deep—three buttons control bumps, blocks, sets, and spikes—so noncommitted players can easily keep the ball bouncing back and forth, and pros who demand precision can perfect their diving saves and smash drops.

CJ: When I first booted up *Summer Heat*, I prepared for a bad *DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball* clone. But what I got was a surprisingly decent game of v-ball that didn't stink like the rotting beached whale carcass I expected. I agree with Paul's assessment of the controls, though most of my matches devolved into playing follow-the-arrow at backcourt while my A.I. partner tore it up in front. Still, if you own a PS2 and want to knock some balls around in the sand, go for it.

PAUL: Forgoing the teasing titillation of *DOA*, *Summer Heat* instead delivers a straightforward sports simulation. Unfortunately, Shawn's all wrong about the control. *Heat*'s mushy scheme relies too heavily on context, making your beach bunny set when you intended an unstoppable spike, and its overbearing interface banishes guesswork (and psych-out strategy) from the game. Still, the virtual volleyball action is fast-paced and fun, with enough unlockable venues, characters, and minigames to keep you indoors all summer, safe from the sunlight that ruins the gamer's trademark pallor.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHAWN	CJ	PAUL
6.0	6.5	6.5

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Acclaim Studios Cheltenham
Players: 1-2 (2-4 w/ Multitap)
ESRB: Teen

www.acclaim.com

The nifty Quest mode even has bosses. Tackling them will push your dice-dueling skills to the limit.

PS2 / Also On: None

BOMBASTIC

Aww, what a cute puzzle game—kaboom!

Good: Addictive fun
Bad: Screwy Wars mode
Chicks Will Dig: Those li'l devil babies

CRISPIN: It may look like *Yahtzee* from the explosive depths of Hades, but *Bombastic*—the PS2 sequel to *Devil Dice*, *EGM*'s 1998 Puzzle Game of the Year—is actually an addictive, unconventional puzzler…even if it involves some math. Here's the equation: Guiding hellishly cute wee devils, players shimmy across a board and try to connect dice with the same face value. Match enough and they go boom, igniting any nearby die that shows the same number or one digit less. If all that sounds complex…it is. But mastering the basics doesn't take long—thanks to tutorials and a fun Quest mode that builds your dice-detonating skills.

Before long, you'll be stringing out megacombos and surviving marathon sessions, which are best played cooperatively with another player. (If only the competitive multiplayer Wars mode—which supports up to five players via a Multitap—were as fun.) When all the big bangs leave you shell-shocked, you can even switch to the original, nonexplosive-dice mode for a less-hectic game. That and special scenario-unlocking online codes blast *Bombastic*'s replay value higher.

JENNIFER: The dice…the fiendish dice! What initially seemed overly mathematical and number-crunchingly complex has now taken over my psyche. When I close my eyes I see pulsating dice in fabulous combinations: bread-and-butter twos, upmarket fours or fives, and the luscious, delectable sixes. *Bombastic*'s irresistible single-player mode had me hearing the call of the dice long after I needed to put…the game…away (in hopes of getting any real work done). But even so, I found myself wanting prettier graphics, and the five-player mode was way too complex for me.

SHOE: Most people won't have the patience or drive to learn how to play *Bombastic*. It's intimidating and not a casual gamer's game. But look deep enough, and you'll find one addicting puzzler that'll exercise the left and right halves of your noggin. Hardcore types will enjoy getting into that "zone" when everything comes together and double-digit combos flood the screen. *Devil Dice* fans will dig the new explosive chain reactions that allow near limitless combos (and if that's too cheap for you, try the unlockable original game).

(Left) Up to five players can share the confusion in the not-quite-fun Wars mode.

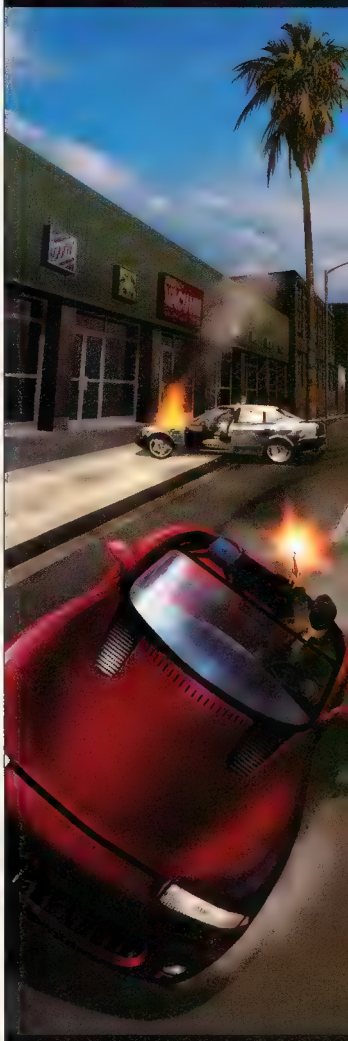
THE VERDICTS

CRISPIN	JENNIFER	SHOE
8.0	7.5	8.5

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Shift
Players: 1-2 (2-5 w/Multitap)
ESRB: Everyone

www.capcom.com

THIS IS NOT A DRIVING GAME.



"...an immense landscape covering hundreds of miles of LA streets..."
-IGN.com

A shotgun blast to the gut will serve only to annoy *SH3*'s more disgusting foes.

PS2 / Also On: None

SILENT HILL 3

The most beautiful nightmare ever

SHANE: *Silent Hill 3* is scary, and I'm talking freaked-the-f***-out-at-3 a.m. scary. I mean it—after an inexplicably horrific run-in with a blood-spewing bathtub at Brookhaven Hospital, sleep was out of the question for me. I had to see this horror adventure through to the end, and you should, too.

The past two *Silent Hill* titles made serious strides toward excellence, but *SH3* easily trumps them. The improvements start with the main character—you assume the role of Heather, a cute (though seemingly strung-out) heroine who's embroiled in a twisted mess of alternate realities and hideous monsters. She's very likable, believable, and expertly voiced, so it's easy to get wrapped up in the gruesome narrative through her. The story feels very tight—the dialogue's not as stilted as in *SH2*, puzzles make logical sense, and series fans will love how closely this tale ties into the first game's plot. The most stunning upgrades, however, grace the visuals and sounds. Intricately detailed environments constantly astound, from spookily deserted subway stations to grotesque hallways hewn from pulsating flesh. Factor in life-like character models and *Splinter Cell*–quality shadows and you've got the best-looking game on PS2. Plus, the phenomenal score and eerie sound effects complement the graphics perfectly.

Sadly, some of the endemic *Silent Hill* problems haven't been corrected—combat's still clumsy (it's best to run away) and the game's simply too short. Regardless, *SH3*'s still a must for horror fans.

JON D: If this is your first visit to the town of Silent Hill, you won't appreciate that *SH3* is the most together game in the series: Combat finally requires strategy (unless you're a chicken like Shane), environments feel more organic than ever, and veterans of the PS1 original get a reasonable wrap-up of its circuitous story. But jeez, my first pass through clocked in at barely six hours! Granted, these scant hours were action-packed—the first two games' meandering through foggy streets is mercifully minimized. But I was hoping for more buildings to explore and bosses to fell. The ones in here are gorgeous, but milder settings (subway, mall) don't have the psychologically trying connotations of *SH2*'s ghastly locales. Still, it's worth buying in a hastened heartbeat.

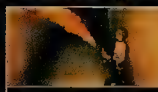
JOE: *SH3* is easily the best horror adventure yet and contains the most effective use of atmosphere in any title I've ever played. While *SH2* shows all its creepy cards at once, *SH3* inches out the scares with excellent pacing—there are numerous frightening little moments that'll resonate in your mind long after you've beaten it. And although it's definitely one of PS2's best-looking games, the audio is truly the best feature. Often, you'll hear little cries out in the night, the forlorn sounding call of a horn, or howls in the distance—unsettling stuff indeed. *SH3* has a few minor rough edges (the analog control is loose, for one) and it drags a bit near the end, but that's it. Scary *and* fun.

The Sounds of Silence: Every copy of *Silent Hill 3* includes a copy of the full CD soundtrack for your listening pleasure. If you've played the past two *Silent Hill* games, you're familiar with Akira Yamaoka's unique blend of poignant guitar melodies and mind-searing white noise. While it's not exactly the kind of disc you'll want to whip out at a dance party, it's a cool freebie nonetheless.

Reasons for replay

Silent Hill 3 offers plenty of incentives to tackle it again in the Extra New Game mode.

New Costumes: Look *EGM* chic—type EGMpretaporter on the Bonus Shirt screen.



New Weapons: Unlock cool weapons such as the flame-thrower and beam saber.

Boxer Mode: Put in the classic "Konami Code" (see page 148) for boxer action.

The mall hasn't been this scary since...wait, going to the mall has always been this scary.

Good: Unbelievably atmospheric visuals
Bad: Over too quickly
Nipe Bonus: Free soundtrack CD

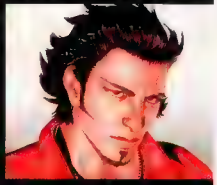
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.5	8.5	9.0
	SHANE	JON D.	JOE

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami Tokyo
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.konami.com

Geometry kicked in the teeth never felt so ... good, bring.

New characters Goh (Japanese judo freakazoid, above) and Brad Burns (Italian kickboxer, below) round out the cast.



PS2 / Also On: None

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION

Natural selection at work

Good: The deepest fighting game ever
Bad: Can't share customized fighters
Cool Freebie: *VF 10th Anniversary*, a remake of the original *VF*

SHANE: Here's a lesson in how to improve upon perfection: Take PS2's finest fighting game, add two creative new characters, program in scads of intensely challenging A.I. fighters (based on Tokyo's deadliest *VF* players), offer up mad unlockables, and spit-polish the already-amazing graphics. Then proceed to sell the tricked-out remake for only 20 bucks.

I simply can't recommend *VF4: Evo* enough—every conceivable facet gleams with quality. Control is fluid, instinctive, and easy to grasp, yet mastering each fighter's individual complexities requires studious dedication. And you'll really want to improve beyond mere mashing, as success in the excellent Quest mode nets spectacular prizes—crazy outfits, wild accessories, movie clips, classic stages, and more (although, regrettably, you can't import your personalized characters into a friend's game this time). There's just so much clever, unique stuff to earn that replay value is nearly infinite, even if you're playing solo. And it's this customization that gives *Evo* the slight edge over its nearest competitor, *Soul Calibur II* (page 103). They're both brilliant fighters, but I guarantee that you'll have a more rewarding time with *Evo* in the long run.

SHAWN: There's no disputing *Evo*'s first-rate status—it's as fleshed-out, complicated, and utterly addictive as fighters come. And although deep mastery requires serious dedication, any player can attain formidable skills with *Evo*'s comprehensive Training mode. Yet even with the enticing price tag, adding only two new contenders seems a bit stingy. And if, unlike Shane, collecting bric-a-brac ain't your bag, you won't bother fighting the computer for pink sweatbands.

KOW—CHE: Like its title suggests, *Evo* takes Sega's staggering chop-socky PS2 masterpiece and fine-tunes it to near perfection. Of course, if you've already played the hell out of *VF4*, you've seen most of this before. Even so, adding two new characters opens up entire new realms of strategic possibility while maintaining the original's delicate gameplay balance. But the real reason to plunk down 20 bucks is for *Evo*'s superb Quest mode. Replay value abounds—pick it up today.

Simplicity is a strict taskmaster—*Virtua Fighter*'s three-button gameplay masks serious depth.

THE VERDICTS

EVO	10	9.0	9.5
	SHANE	SHAWN	CHE

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega AM2
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.sega.com

THIS IS NOT A FIGHTING GAME.

"The fighting in *True Crime* looks just as good, if not better, than many of the fighting games out there."
Electronic Gaming Monthly, Jan. 2003

Tonight! On Fox's *When Licenses Collide!*, that one guy hits the other guy.

PS2

ALIENS VERSUS PREDATOR: EXTINCTION

In space, no one can hear you snore

The Colonial marines' sunny picnic takes a turn for the tragic when uninvited guests arrive.

Good: Console real-time-strategy games are a rarity
Bad: Having to frequently save and wait for units to heal. Yawn
Not Cool Enough For A Title Mention: Colonial marines

JOE: *AVP: Extinction* squeezes PC real-time-strategy gameplay onto consoles…and for the most part, it's a good fit. For example, traditional resource management has been mercifully stripped down: Predators collect skulls and Colonial marines repair atmospheric converters to earn points for upgrades or reinforcements, while Aliens use fallen foes to spawn their brood. These intrinsic differences make each race's game worth playing, and you'll find diverse missions in each campaign, too.

It's not all chest-bursting excitement, though—like that guy with the long face said, the waiting is the hardest part. Much of the game is spent killing time while your units heal, your Predator's stealth energy recharges, or—worst yet—your troops find their way. When you send a large group to a spot on the map, at least one unit will take a strange alternate path and get annihilated. Moving your party into a new area too quickly can also lead to squad-killing ambushes, so you have to inch along and save frequently. There's entertainment to be had with *Extinction*, but expect a lot of hair-pulling to go along with it.

SHOE: You like strategy. You like a hard-core challenge, but you understand that console RTS games aren't as deep as most PC ones. You don't bitch when using a joy-pad for something that's traditionally played with a mouse. You, my friend, will love *Extinction*. It offers tons of variety, and individual missions can suck you in for a couple of hours (because they take planning—and they're tough!). This is a great game except for one problem: Units sometimes forget you're in control and just take some wayward path to their doom.

JENNIFER: Apparently, I'm not one of those people Shoe thinks will dig this game. RTS games appeal to control freaks, and though I certainly fall into that category, when the control is difficult in a game for control freaks, well, control freaks like me freak out. I thought Marines were the most elite of our fine armed forces, so why the heck can't they run in formation when I tell them to? *Extinction* is definitely a competent title, but to enjoy it, you'll need extreme flexibility and patience. Good luck with that.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JOE	SHOE	JENNIFER
	6.5	8.0	6.5

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: Zono
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.eagames.com

Get used to seeing those guardrails, since every single track in the game is fully fenced in.

Xbox / Also On: None

GROUP S CHALLENGE

Jumps off the starting line and blows a gasket

Good: Lots of licensed cars to choose from
Bad: Awful slowdown ruins any sense of speed
Where's The: Online play?

GREG S: If you're looking for an Xbox racer to surpass *Project Gotham Racing* or *Sega GT*, *Group S Challenge* is not the game for you. You'd be much better off waiting for those titles' upcoming sequels (or even just playing the originals again) than investing in this mediocre racing sim.

Group S is another pretender to *Gran Turismo*'s throne, offering customizable licensed cars and realistic raceways. Despite its simulation trappings, though, the gameplay's totally arcadey. Powerslide-heavy, *Ridge Racer*-style control gives cars just the right amount of drift to make it enjoyable, but not to the point where you'll lose control in the turns. Unfortunately, the game suffers from so much slowdown when multiple cars are onscreen that it curtails any fun you might be having.

Not that the fun would last, anyway—*Group S* is a seriously short game. Yes, there are lots of cars to buy, but the races are so brief and repetitive that I could never imagine playing through the game over and over again to fill out that garage. Overall, it's an uneven, seemingly thrown-together effort from Capcom.

DEMIAN: Sure, it has some licensed cars, upgradeable parts, and (more or less) real-world locations, but unfortunately, *Group S* isn't quite on the same level as *Gran Turismo* or *Sega GT*. Though the driving physics are better than average, the meager part-swapping options won't satisfy serious tweakers. Also, the computer A.I. is annoying—apparently, the other racers are aspiring demolition derby drivers, as they'd sooner ram into you than pass cleanly. Now if only Capcom would graft the style of *Auto Modellista* to *Group S*'s more realistic underpinnings....

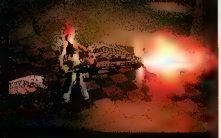
XBN—CHE: *Group S* had the potential to truly be Xbox's answer to *Gran Turismo*; but as it sits right now, that position has yet to be filled (even *Sega GT*'s still closer than this). Visually, there's little here that impresses—poor lighting makes the cars look oddly unrealistic, and the walled-in courses are uniformly uninteresting. Also, Demian's right about those nasty, thick-skulled A.I. racers who ram your ass from start to finish—really annoying. Better to save your dollars for *Sega GT Online*.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	GREG S.	DEMIAN	CHE
	5.0	6.0	5.0

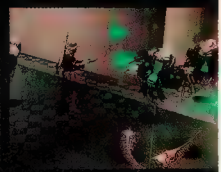
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Everyone

www.capcom.com

Extras from the "Thriller" video taste flamethrower



"If it bleeds, we can kill it."



PS2 / Also On: None

HUNTER: THE RECKONING WAYWARD

Hunting for tchotchkes on empty streets

Good: Firing a rocket into a group of zombies, *Narc*-style
Bad: Totally weak spells
We Hate: Chasing the teleporting rogue hunter

PAUL: In this amusing but shallow shoot-and/or-beat-em-up, your warriors eviscerate and perforate the horde of horrors that has infested the quaint town of Ashcroft. Ranged combat is really fun while the ammo lasts, and close-quarters fighting gets the job done. *Wayward*'s spells, unfortunately, are neither cool nor very useful. But overall, the action has an enjoyable rhythm: Hack up the sparse vanguard, fight your way through a teeming mob of zombies, and mop up the stragglers. Whew.

Your party of five characters grows more powerful as you progress, but so do the monsters; combat in the game's last half-hour feels just like it does in the first. *Wayward* needs something to keep it interesting, like stronger melee weapons to discover or new moves to learn. Couldn't we have bosses with attack patterns and weak points to figure out, rather than these chumps who merely circle us halfheartedly while we empty clips into 'em?

Finally, most of *Wayward*'s missions are too dull: Get to the exit, or collect X number of thingamajigs. Searching for meaningless items long after you've destroyed all the enemies is just plain boring.

BRYAN: If this game had better pacing from beginning to end, I could maybe warm up to it a bit. Instead, the first 20 missions consist of hunting for various doodads or painstakingly acting as someone's bodyguard—more frustrating than fun. You'll likely turn in your hunter's license before ever arriving at the game's more adrenaline-pumpin' portions—the later stages are all about the kill. Sure, joining a friend in Co-op is a plus, but I still prefer *Chaos Legion*'s monster mash.

JON D: This simple, repetitive slash-a-thon is good old-fashioned fun for a short time, especially with a partner. The controls and chaotic gameplay smack vaguely of the arcade classic *Smash TV*. Offering five unique playable characters adds to the thrills—when you get tired of playing as some forgotten N.W.O. wrestler, you can switch to Lenny Kravitz's drummer on the next level (*Wayward* identities are inherently lame, so I gave 'em personas of my own). The developers cut a few corners on noncombat animations and ugly cut-scenes, but casual gamers should still give it a rental.

(Left) This werewolf boss isn't very menacing. "You gonna bark all day, little doggie, or are you gonna bite?"

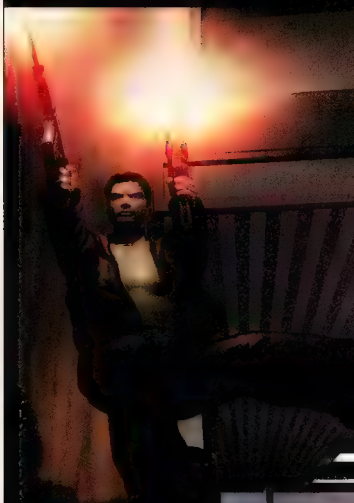
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

PAUL	BRYAN	JON D.
6.0	5.0	6.0

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: High Voltage
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Mature

www.vugames.com

THIS IS NOT A SHOOTING GAME.



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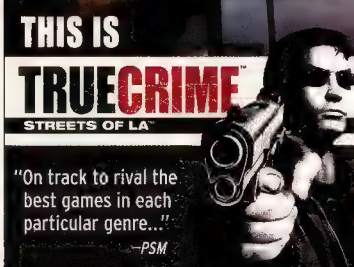

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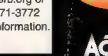

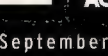

Coming September 2003
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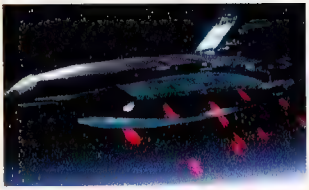
The lightsabers flow like wine in *KOTOR*'s battles—it's enough to make a *Star Wars* fan swoon with pleasure.



An Expanding Galaxy
If seven planets aren't enough to sate your galaxy-exploring wanderlust, you may be in luck. LucasArts and BioWare are planning to offer fresh downloadable content (via Xbox Live) soon after *KOTOR*'s release. We don't have specifics, but we're gunning for a mission on the Gungan home planet. We'd pay a *Back to the Future*-style visit to prevent Jar Jar Binks' parents from ever getting together in the first place.

Xbox / Also On: None (ONLINE)

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

We've got a good feeling about this one....

BRYAN: After 40-plus hours of gripping gameplay, I can safely say that *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* is a total blast. BioWare's trademark open-ended gameplay (made famous in PC hits like *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights*) dovetails remarkably well with core elements from *Star Wars* folklore to create one masterful role-playing game.

What makes *KOTOR* so appealing is that from start to finish, you direct how the adventure unfolds. You shape every aspect of your hero's being—from physical appearance and class attributes to the color and qualities of their lightsaber. You choose whether your character follows the light or dark side of the Force—a philosophical struggle that can be as simple as saying the right thing in a conversation, or as intricate as deciding whether to let someone live or die. The story line itself delivers an incredible sense of freedom and surprising replay value, with separate light/dark endings and multiple optional quests to tackle.

After suffering through the stilted screenplays (and equally wooden acting) of the recent flicks, *KOTOR*'s engaging plot is a welcome relief to *Star Wars* geeks like yours truly. Fleshed-out characters, surprising plot twists, and expertly delivered dialogue combine to form an epic narrative.

The game also boasts a fine balance of exploration and combat. Battles occur frequently, but they're so quick and action-packed that I never tired of kicking the crap out of Kath Hounds. Gamers looking for pure action will need time to acclimate to the turn-based melees, but the smooth mechanics of slicing, tossing grenades, and busting out Force powers are ultimately easy to grasp.

Two minor problems do arise. The visuals could use another coat of polish, and after finishing the game, you can't return to complete any remaining side quests. But at least the latter provides me with an excuse to invest another 40 hours (plus, then I can see what it's like transforming my character into an evil Sith Lord). No Jedi mind tricks needed here—this is a must buy.

JENNIFER: Both PC role-playing fans (like me) and console gamers weaned on less hardcore fare can sit back and bask in *KOTOR*'s magnificence. This is an RPG like no other, either on PC or console. The statistics-heavy *Dungeons & Dragons* rules set that dominates most BioWare RPGs is virtually transparent here. You can ignore it if you want to just charge through, but all your dice rolls and combat modifiers are right there on the feedback screen if you wish to study them scrupulously to improve strategy. Your three-person party is easy to manage—but again, there's utter flexibility. For the most part, party members take care of themselves, though if you wish to pause at any point

Dungeons & Dragons... without the dungeons or the dragons

Gamers unfamiliar with *D&D* won't recognize the various attributes that make up a character, and they don't have to—the game offers recommended choices whenever you need to make a decision.

But if you like intense customization, *KOTOR* really lets you go crazy. Every character has base statistics (which determine how many hit points they have, how quickly they react in combat, how fast their Force power regenerates, etc.) that you can adjust every time you level up. Items you encounter also have their own stats and bonuses, so a particular piece of armor might give you a Dexterity bonus or increase your Fortitude save. BioWare has further upped the ante with upgradeable items, so you can use certain components to increase stats on already good gear.

You can outfit your individual party members and tweak their statistics and gear throughout the game.

You can change your party lineup depending on your needs in certain battles. (We often went for an all-Jedi cast, just 'cause of the cool lightsabers.)

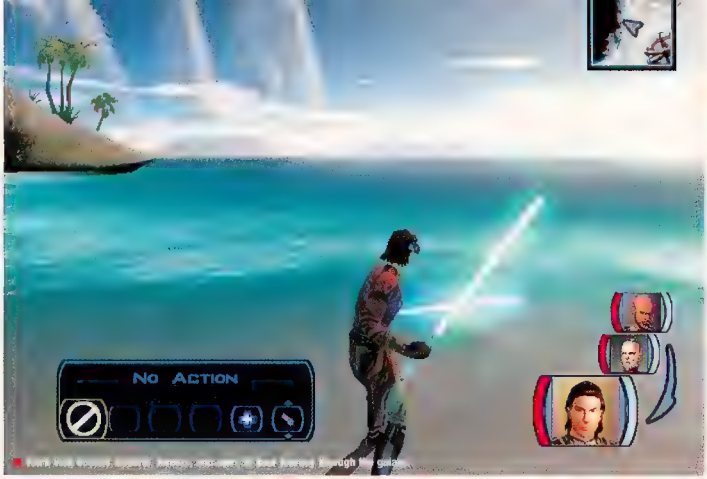
Good: Light/dark-side character development
Bad: Graphics could be a tad crisper
Best *Star Wars* Tale Since: *The Empire Strikes Back*

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

BRYAN	JENNIFER	JOE
9.0	10	9.5

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: BioWare
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.lucasarts.com



No, I am not your father!

What a Wookiee!

Forgive? Screw that! Use your Wookiee strength and rip his damn arms off!

Chewbacca—he's a household name now, and *KOTOR* takes you to his home planet of Kashyyyk, where you'll meet his ancestors, learn about Wookiee culture, and help your Wookiee settle a score. Throughout the game, your party members share personal info that can lead to quests. Taking an interest in your companions might reveal whole new subplots, which help immerse you deeper in the overall story.

and adjust their moves, you can go right ahead. You'll also enjoy outfitting your party members with the loads of cool loot you find along the way. Dual-wielding two lightsabers is awesome, but when you can upgrade them with found crystals, it's that much more personal.

KOTOR is like the movie we all hoped *Episode 1* would be—enthralling plot, marvelous visuals and voice acting, deep immersion in the galaxy's many worlds, with all that noble Jedi malarkey lightened up by old-school *Episode 4*-style humor. But the genius is in the light- and dark-side choices you're forced to make throughout. This brilliant adaptation of the *D&D* alignment system helps you truly feel how even the most well-intentioned Jedi would consider the dark side: A lot of the time, it's just easier that way. I'm not saying I succumbed, but I did struggle with the temptation frequently.

Add to all this a bounty of side quests, tons of cool gear, and nice touches like the well-designed map system, quest log, and inventory management, and this is an RPG revolution every console gamer should experience.

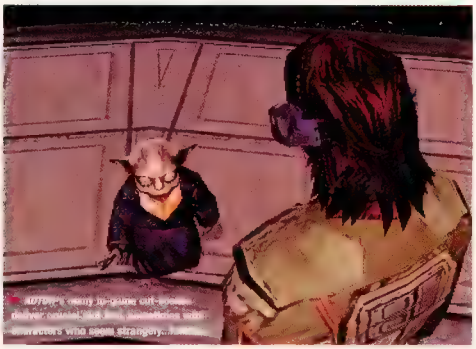
JOE: With its excellent story line, likeable characters, and snappy sense of humor, *KOTOR* hits many of the same notes that the original *Star Wars* trilogy did. In fact, in many ways it's a better follow-up to the first series than the current film run. You could simply spend days exploring *Knights*' numerous side quests and not only barely scratch the surface of the game's narrative arc, but also not mind in the least. It's *that* good.

Some of the game's less fantastic moments stand out in contrast against the rest, but only slightly. For instance, the combat system initially seems strange because you feel like you should have more control over your characters' actions, but the turn-based fighting becomes progressively more interesting (and intuitive) over time. Likewise, the minigames (manning a gun turret or racing a pod-racer-like swoop bike) are largely uninteresting, but they're easily avoided or over too quickly for you to mind.

Minor quibbles cannot tarnish the brilliance of the open-ended gameplay—*Knights* is such an all-encompassing experience that when you're away from the game, you'll end up talking about it to everyone you know. "Hello, Dad? Guess what? I've finally gotten to Kashyyyk. (Pause.) C'mon, you know. Wookiee World?!?"

Full of the sort of charm and polish that you normally find only within titles from developers like Nintendo, Square, and Bungie, *Knights* sets new standards for both its genre and system. Finally, Xbox owners have another game worth mentioning in the same sentence as *Halo*.

Have it both ways, you can: In order to see both the light- and dark-side endings, keep multiple save games and then return to key decisions and pick the alternate answers. It's faster than starting over.



Why the empty space where you should see your rifle coughing up brass casings?

Xbox / Also On: None ONLINE

GHOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER

Online or bust

SHAWN: Ten-hut! Death just pried Castro's cold fingers from Cuba, and opportunistic guerillas seek to exploit the power vacuum. It's your job to bitch-slap the evildoers and make the besieged nation safe for democracy and McDonald's. But before you re-enlist for a second tour of duty with last winter's best-selling *Ghost Recon*, be warned that *Island Thunder* is more of an update than a true sequel. It's a standalone port of a PC expansion pack, and all of the first game's flaws stand uncorrected. You're still stuck with the same angular hills, jagged bushes, and bare buildings; strafing so slow that you'd swear your soldier's wearing cement boots; and a wearisome mix of overanxious squadmates and predictable enemies. Put bluntly, the single-player game is merely OK.

Thankfully, it's a whole 'nother war online. Single-shot kills make life precious, foes truly fearsome, and friends an utter necessity. Do the five new multiplayer maps and additional weapons make *Island Thunder* worth your while? Yes, if you dodged the last draft. Right now, *Ghost Recon* is the best tactical shooter Xbox Live has to offer. Veterans, on the other hand, might expect these perks free of charge. If you do decide to deploy, however, publisher Ubi Soft promises more downloadable support down the line. React accordingly.

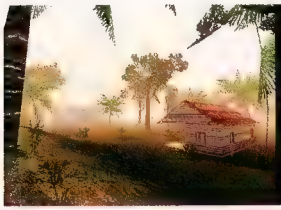
JOE: The fact that *Ghost Recon*'s gameplay still appeals to me—even though *Island Thunder* is really just more of the same and its graphics are painfully dated—is a testament to how enjoyable this squad-based shooter is. Though you can beat *Island Thunder*'s eight-mission single-player appetizer relatively quickly, multiplayer is a heartier meal. The new maps and different gameplay modes offer a great deal of variety, making online play incredibly fun—at least when you're on the right side of the ballistics distribution.

Still, there isn't a great deal of bang for your buck. The promise of extra downloadable missions and maps in the future is encouraging, but I'd feel better recommending *Island Thunder* if it ran for $29.99 rather than $39.99. *Ghost Recon* aficionados will want to visit *Island*, but everyone else should consider waiting for *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3*.

MARK: Besides an excellent interface for commanding and switching between your computer-controlled teammates, single-player *Island Thunder* performs like just another nameless recruit: Controls are decent, the graphics barely passable, and the mission objectives and enemy A.I. merely sufficient. It's fun to build up particular soldiers' attributes with points you earn from completed tasks, but the game never gets so difficult that you care when one of your troops gets killed.

Online, however, *Thunder* deserves a salute for its wide selection of match types and well-designed multiplayer maps—the burned-out bases and beachside cabanas make for great playgrounds. It's no *SOCOM* (PS2), but it's as close as you'll find on Xbox.

Take Charge
If your teammates are horsing around, chances are they've been perforated more than a roll of TP. Try renewing their hope by making a tactical suggestion, proposing a plan, or asking for assistance. You'd be surprised at how fast an annoying Urkel can become an invaluable ally with the right encouragement.



New Developments

The first *Ghost Recon* left troops stranded without downloadable content. *Island Thunder* not only redresses the oversight, but also comes locked and loaded with:

- Five new urban, jungle, and beach-based maps for multiplayer
- 12 new weapons, such as the M4 SOCOM rifle and the MM-1 semi-automatic grenade launcher
- Two new multiplayer game types: Behemoth and Defend

Good: Tense online firefights
Bad: Brief solo campaign is a breeze
Pricey: 40 bucks for a glorified expansion pack

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHAWN	JOE	MARK
7.5	7.0	7.0

Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Red Storm
Players: 1-2 (2-16 online/linked)
ESRB: Mature

www.ubisoft.com

The Xbox version is the best looking, though that's not saying too much in this case.

Xbox / Also On: PS2, GC

THE ITALIAN JOB

Like a Mini Cooper commercial that costs $50!

Run over boxes and earn extra points. That's right—read it again if you have to.

Good: Getting your Mini up on two wheels
Bad: Boring, repetitive missions
Official Michael Caine Seal of Approval: No

DEMIAN: This *Job*, not to be confused with the first *Italian Job* game (PS1), is loosely based on the recent *Italian Job* movie remake. I know this because of the approximately five seconds of film footage they show at the start. Once that's out of the way, the game consists of a series of missions, most of which involve driving a Mini, finding a Mini, or driving a Mini in search of more Minis. If you are, say, in the Guinness book as the world's biggest fan of Mini Coopers, this could conceivably be quite enjoyable—like a dream, even. If you're anybody else (well, aside from G. Ford), it gets boring fast. You'll soon stop caring about the mission objectives, since they're almost all the same: The red dot on your radar is where you need to go. So get there.

While the arcadey driving physics aren't too bad, there's nothing else about *Job* that's particularly fun. Not the meager Stunt or Circuit modes, and certainly not the stage where you have to chase another car for *six and a half minutes*. Go see the original '69 *Italian Job* movie instead, and let us never speak of Italian jobs again.

G. FORD: Gee guys, you're being awfully rough on *The Italian Job*. I know it's nothing revolutionary, but this racer offers simple, responsive controls, neat stunts, and story bits lifted from the movie's cool plot—enough to keep me entertained until the end. The Story, Circuit, and Stunt modes are all solid, sending you through an impressive-looking L.A. in some sleek cars (with no noticeable graphical hit in two-player matches). My biggest beef? You'll most likely polish off this game in a weekend. A great rental.

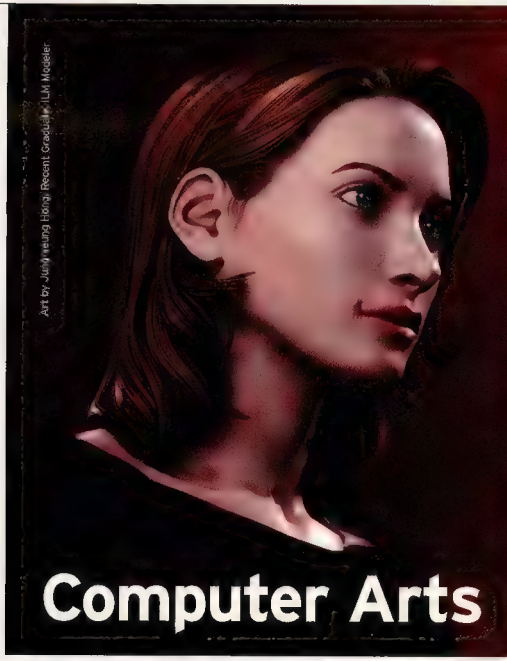
GREG S: I think Ford's letting his crush on Marky Mark cloud his judgment, 'cause I wouldn't even rent this game if it were free. My big problem is that the radar in *Italian Job* is completely useless. Including a rough street layout map (like in *Vice City* or *Midnight Club II*) would have improved the gameplay dramatically. As it stands, the boring, repetitive, and annoying missions will only frustrate you. If you must drive a Mini, buy the much better (and much cheaper) *Italian Job* on PS1.

THE VERDICTS (OUTOF 10)

DEMIAN	G.FORD	GREG S.
[illegible]	6.5	[illegible]

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Climax
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.italianjobgame.com



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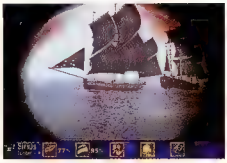
There's nothing a pirate hates more than a flaming poop deck.

Xbox / Also On: None

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

This seafaring RPG barely stays afloat



(Above) You're pirating solo until you hire some trustworthy lads from local taverns.

Good: Wide-open gameplay
Bad: Glitches, bugs, awkward combat
Not In The Manual: Push in the right stick for a map

MARK: Most gamers probably won't make it eight hours into this nautical Arr-PG before tossing it overboard—two hours max for anyone lured in by the slapped-on movie license. Why? After a pathetic "tutorial," *Pirates* hurls you into an ocean of confusing menus, frustrating battles, jittery camera movement, and more bugs than a beehive. But, as with Bethesda's medieval RPG *Morrowind* (on which this game is heavily based), *Pirates* offers unique gameplay freedom as a reward to those dedicated enough to play through the pain.

Exciting options abound in how you choose to build up your character (gutsy swordsman, expert seaman, or shrewd trader?), shape your reputation (hero or rogue?), choose and solve missions (plunder towns, explore dungeons, or bother with the main quest?), and more. And yes, the controls and interface are terrible, but as your characters gain skills and you learn tricks for avoiding the game's rough edges, they become bearable. Like sunken treasure, hidden within *Pirates*' choppy seas is a decent game only those with plenty of time and patience will ever discover.

CRISPIN: My *Pirates* experience was far from swashbuckling—this is one of the most wildly inconsistent games I've ever played. Ship combat is a beast to master and only becomes something less than frustrating once you've upped your skills and amassed an armada (but even then it's still tedious). And I spent hours at a stretch not really sure where to go or what to do, only to—shiver me timbers!—suddenly have a dozen plot points and subquests hit me at once. It was just enough to keep my interest afloat despite so much of this game being barely shipshape.

SHANE: The complex plot, deep customization, and copious subquests can't save this shipwreck. It's like *Morrowind*, minus the best part—exploration. Here, you spend too much time running errands between a handful of tiny islands. The gameplay simply isn't fun: Delving into the intricacies of pirate economics left me cold, and sloppy control leeched all fun out of stabbing skeletal monkeys. It's not a total wash, though—I warmed up to the naval warfare, and I've rarely seen a nicer virtual sunset.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MARK	CRISPIN	SHANE
6.0	5.5	

Publisher: Bethesda
Developer: Akella
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

pirates.bethsoft.com

When inverted nac-nacs induce yawns, you know something's wrong with your extreme racer.

GC / Also On: Xbox

SX SUPERSTAR

Racing game or over-the-counter sleep aid?

Try not to crash there, Evel Knievel—you're guaranteed to respawn facing a guardrail.

Good: It's kind of funny...well, a little
Bad: Supercross racing has never been so boring
Better Bring: Toothpicks for your eyelids

GREG S: I'm a sucker for a good Career mode in a racing game, and *Superstar*'s setup definitely sounds cool at first: You strive for supercross stardom, earning sponsorships, buying bikes, moving into nicer apartments, and dating prettier women along the way. Unfortunately, it's nothing more than a cheesy front-end for one of the most boring, shallow bike racing games on the market.

Your career lasts only three very short seasons, and none of the races offers any challenge. Gameplay is twitchy and easy: I won every event the first time through by simply running sloppy laps. What's worse is that the various styles of events (Stadium, Baja, Uphill) all feel and play exactly the same. Only the Stunt Challenge delivers anything different, but this mode is seriously flawed—a mushy, unintuitive trick system ruins the potential for fun.

Frankly, I find it difficult to believe this halfhearted throwaway is from the developer that brought us the excellent *MotoGP 1* and *2* on Xbox. I guess Climax UK should stick to bikes that race solely on pavement from now on.

DEMIAN: If nothing else, at least *SX Superstar* can be credited with taking the "earn new girlfriends in the game" idea to its nadir. How? Four words, a hyphen, and a slash: trailer-trash mother/daughter. Moving on, *SX* is an arcadey but uninspiring motocross racer with uneven track design—ranging from quite good to awful—and occasionally glitchy bike physics. Cumbersome menus, washed-out visuals, bad voice acting, and worse music are just more bumps in an already rough track.

SHAWN: I agree: Your aspiring superstar's rise from the poorhouse to a penthouse is little more than a dumb gimmick draped over a dull game. I stopped caring about the soap opera story line when one of my seemingly amnesiac lovers forgot I'd already dumped her a half-dozen times. And sadly, life on the supercross circuit is no less insipid. The controls are stiffer and less forgiving than Ike Turner on Viagra, and when your crash-prone rider respawns after eating dirt, he's often facing a wall.

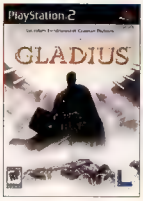
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

GREG S.	DEMIAN	SHAWN

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Climax
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.acclaim.com

If you bought all these games, it would cost about **$340.**



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OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE

HUT, HUT, HIKE!

Are you ready for some football reviews?

Tighten your shoulder pads and buckle that chin strap. It's time for the yearly deluge of football hopefuls. In this issue, we review three out of the five pro pigskin titles arriving this year.

Sadly, our *NFL GameDay 2004* and *NFL Blitz Pro* critiques must wait until next month, but you can read up on each in our chart (page 126). Let the hard-hitting games begin....

PS2 / Also On: Xbox, GC, PS1 — ONLINE (PS2 ONLY)

MADDEN NFL 2004

Super Bowl–bound

BRYAN: The king of the gridiron returns with several small but oh-so-effective gameplay improvements that once again cement *Madden*'s superiority in the football genre. It all starts with the fantastic new Playmaker Control feature—with a quick flick of the right analog stick, you can move receivers to open spots in the defensive coverage or, on running plays, you can redirect the blocks of your lineman. This gives you an unprecedented amount of control, so you actually feel like you're commanding the whole team, not just the QB. It's a tough maneuver to master, but worth it—no other game offers control like this. Other on-field subtleties include varying camera angles for rollouts and play-action passes; cooler tackles; and the slick new playcalling menu that speeds up gameplay. Put simply, this is the best-playing *Madden* ever.

Want more? The additions to Franchise mode really deepen the experience. Playing as an NFL owner, you can set hot dog prices, renovate your stadium, or even move the team to another city. Sure, this kind of hyper-realism might bore lightweight fans, but serious football nuts like me will love the attention to detail. Furthermore, playing online (PS2 only) is much better this go-around, thanks to voice chat and online tournaments.

So, is the game flawless? Not quite. Covering receivers remains too difficult, and listening to John "I state the obvious" Madden makes me wonder why he's still in broadcasting. Minor issues aside, *Madden* is yet again *the* game to get.

G. FORD: We are in the midst of a dynasty here, with no end in sight. *Madden 2004* looks great, plays quicksilver-smooth, and offers tons of insanely detailed options (especially if you, like Bryan, long to price stadium concessions), but the whole package is more evolution than revolution. If you have *2003*, there's really no harm sticking with that for another year. But if the new features and updated rosters sound compelling, *2004* is near perfect. The ol' windbag still delivers.

OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION MAG—CHRIS B: I think I've finally figured out the secret to *Madden*'s success. It's not the lifelike visuals, massive playbook, or incoherent commentary—it's that there's always hope. Just like in real NFL matchups, a single play or two—that missed field goal, that successful fourth-down conversion, etc.—often makes all the difference. The bells and whistles Bryan mentioned add a lot to the package, but you just can't beat the core gameplay of *Madden*.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

BRYAN	G. FORD	CHRIS B.
9.5	9.0	9.5

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Tiburon
Players: 1-2 (2-8 w/ Multitap, 1-2 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.easports.com

The Madden Curse

Doesn't Atlanta Falcons' quarterback Michael Vick know that gracing *Madden 2004*'s cover is a bad idea? Didn't anybody clue him in on what happens to EA's cover athletes once their mug lands on the *Madden* game box? It's not good. Take a look:

***Madden NFL 2001*—Tennessee Titans running back Eddie George**
Before Cover: One yard shy of a Super Bowl victory against the St. Louis Rams.
After Cover: Upset in the AFC divisional playoffs at home by the Ironclad Baltimore Ravens.

***Madden NFL 2002*—Minnesota Vikings quarterback Daunte Culpepper**
Before Cover: Culpepper led the Vikings to an 11-5 regular season record and a berth into the NFC championship game.
After Cover: Team finished with a 5-11 record and failed to make the playoffs.

***Madden NFL 2003*—St. Louis Rams running back Marshall Faulk**
Before Cover: Super Bowl runner-up to the New England Patriots.
After Cover: Riddled with injuries, the Rams dropped to a 7-9 record, missing the playoffs for the first time since 1998.

■ PS2 / Also On: Xbox ONLINE

ESPN NFL FOOTBALL

Another year as backup

BRYAN: Sega's football franchise trained its guts out this off-season. I welcome the new *Madden*-esque playcalling menu and the healthy injection of ESPN telecast elements into the game's presentation. Yet, even with these changes and enhanced running game, *ESPN NFL Football* remains second-string behind *Madden*; its Franchise options don't stack up to Johnny boy's title. And while I applaud the attempt at first-person football, this so-called revolutionary feature is disorienting, not to mention boring, when you play any other position than quarterback.

G. FORD: There's a lot to like about this game: Solid controls, the ESPN presentation, the cool fan close-ups, and the good (but repetitive) announcers. The first-person mode, however, is a beautiful-looking disaster. Manually swinging your view around or anticipating a blitz proves far too hard. Gimmick aside, the heart of this game delivers.

OPM—CHRIS B: Sega's *ESPN* is packed with goodness—most notably the ultraslick ESPN presentation, awesome eight-players-at-once online play, and snappy commentary. However, the unforgiving running game takes a lot of getting used to if you usually play *Madden*. Still, a solid pigskin offering.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	BRYAN	G. FORD	CHRIS B.
	8.0	7.5	8.5

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Visual Concepts
Players: 1-8 offline and online (Xbox: 1-4 offline, 1-8 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.segasports.com

■ Xbox / Also On: None ONLINE

NFL FEVER 2004

Go back and study the playbook

BRYAN: *Fever* has somewhat recovered from its disappointing sophomore season. It feels less arcadey, and the birth of xsnsports.com (where players can create leagues and tournaments) is an online gamer's dream. But when you're up against *ESPN* and *Madden*, you've really got to sweat the details—and that's where *Fever* fails. Problems plague the player models, the camera is too high, the Dynasty mode is still shallow, and *Fever*'s announcers make Madden's demented ramblings sound smart. A stronger showing, but I'm calling for another year of practice.

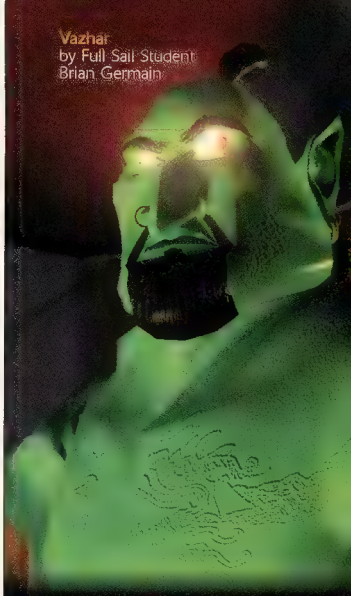
G. FORD: While *Fever* does plenty right, it has its problems. The graphics fail to impress (by Xbox standards), and the overly tough kicking game needs improvement (it's not realistic to routinely miss extra-point attempts). Overall, *Fever* gives a fine showing, but it's just not memorable enough to draw you away from the fierce competition.

OPM—CHRIS B: *Fever* certainly looks nice, and I'm a big fan of the coaches' audible interaction (they offer useful scouting advice). Actual gameplay, however, leaves much to be desired, with less-than-intuitive playcalling and dull atmosphere only making things worse. Choose this over *Madden* only if the xsnsports stuff excites you.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	BRYAN	G. FORD	CHRIS B.
	6.5	6.5	6.0

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Microsoft
Players: 1-8 offline (with system link), 1-8 online
ESRB: Everyone

www.xsnsports.com



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PRO FOOTBALL SCOUTING REPORT

Don't know which pigskin game to buy? Let the *EGM* coaches break it down for you...

	Madden NFL 2004 (EA Sports—PS2, Xbox, GC, PS1)	ESPN NFL Football (Sega—PS2, Xbox)	NFL Fever 2004 (Microsoft—Xbox)	NFL GameDay 2004 (Sony CEA—PS2)	NFL Blitz Pro (Midway—PS2, Xbox, GC)
Online Features:	(Online only for PS2) Includes voice chat, rankings, downloadable rosters, and tournaments	Rankings, downloadable rosters, and the PS2 version now features voice chat	Features voice chat, and through xsnsports.com, you can check out player stats and enter leagues/tourneys	Tourneys, message boards, rankings, downloadable rosters, user mail, voice chat, and buddy lists	(Online only for PS2) User rankings and Midway-sponsored tourneys
Cover Star Cred:	Michael Vick—Atlanta Falcons' "Mr. Everything" quarterback	Warren Sapp—Leader of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' vaunted defense	Peyton Manning—The Indy Colts' quarterback who still can't win a playoff game	LaDainian Tomlinson—San Diego Chargers' stud running back	Terrell Owens—Outta San Francisco; arguably the NFL's No. 1 wideout
We Like:	Playmaker Control, countless Franchise mode options	New playcalling menu, ESPN telecast presentation	xsnsports.com	Calling audibles and hiking the ball via the headset	Taking the hard-hitting action online
We Hate:	John Madden (his baffling commentary has sucked for years)	First-person football (it's clever in theory, but poorly executed here)	The player models (these dudes just don't look enough like the real guys)	The playcalling menu (it's hideous and hard to navigate)	Covering receivers (it's insanely difficult)
We Hope For Next Year:	An online Franchise mode	Chris Berman becomes the play-by-play announcer	Announcer Ron Pitts gets the boot (listening to him is more painful than sitting through Madden's rants)	A new game engine	We're judges for the "Become a Midway Sports Cheerleader" competition
Sim Factor:	The closest to real football without buckling a chin strap	Only *Madden* tops it in terms of realism	Less of an arcade feel, but still too many big plays	Too early to tell—wait for the review next month	Very little after you strip away the new full-field rosters and 1st and 10 markers
Fun Factor:	The only way you'll stop playing this one is when *Madden NFL 2005* arrives	Plays great and feels like you're watching a game on ESPN	Best for online-obsessed sports gamers	We have yet to play the reviewable version	The easiest gridiron game to pick up and play

THE GREAT ESCAPE

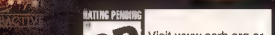
Shot down behind enemy lines.
A prisoner of the Nazi war machine.
You must guide your band of heroes in the greatest escape in history.

Strike at the Reich with an authentic WWII arsenal.

Commandeer motorcycles, jeeps and other military vehicles as you speed to freedom!

Attack from the shadows as you sneak past Nazi guards and the Gestapo.

PlayStation 2



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City raider: Lara's out of the tombs, but she's still up to her old death-defying monkey business and high-wire horseplay.

Whom do you trust? Match your *Raider* fervor with our critics' to see whose review you should listen to. **Crispin:** Your average fan, he embraced the first two PS1 games but tired of Croft's old tricks by the third sequel. **Ethan:** He lost interest in the series after the second game and has spent the least time staring at Croft's keister. **Greg:** Our most die-hard Lara fan, he recently replayed the first *Tomb Raider*—just for the fun of it.

PS2 / Also On: None

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Better never than late?

CRISPIN: You can glimpse *Angel of Darkness*' potential before even starting the adventure. Just flip to the Extras portion of the Main Menu and watch the game's making-of movie, in which moody Core Design designers crow about what they achieved with this much-delayed PlayStation 2 installment in the blockbuster *Tomb Raider* series. They ramble about revamped controls, darker characters, and questions that'll be answered in later episodes of this planned trilogy. OK, now just eject the game disc and play it nevermore, lest you risk disappointment with yet another average *Tomb Raider* installment that—like the last few churned-out PS1 sequels before it—fails to deliver on Core's promises.

Darkness is full of half-realized ideas, including strength power-ups (see the Body sidebar below), a multiple-choice conversation system that barely affects the intriguing but muddled story, and a new tippy-toed stealth pose that I never felt the need to hunker into.

But of all the big ideas that fall flat, only the revamped controls damage the gameplay. Core's goal was to finally make moving Lara an accessible experience. Instead, *Darkness*' scheme is more ponderous than ever and feels like it was designed by 10 people who didn't get along. Tapping the Walk button does one thing. Holding it does another. It takes two buttons to perform a small hop. Lara's jitters made me miss many crucial jumps—to the point where I'd save after every successful leap.

Even if *Darkness*' new controls had worked, much of the game is still missing that sense of exploration—that feeling of "Whoa! Lookit the size of this place! Now how do I get up there?"—that made the first two *Tomb Raider* titles so compelling. Out of the catacombs, Lara now wanders through realistic stark environments (Paris, for instance, teems with one whole person) filled with the usual switch-throwing and block-shoving puzzles. Ironically enough, the game hits its high notes in the few levels actually spent raiding tombs. Maybe Lady Lara should stick to what she knows best.

ETHAN—GAMENOW: Crispin and Greg must have been blinded by the way this new *Angel* jiggles when she wiggles. Her game's an inexcusable mess. Despite a three-year development cycle, *The Angel of Darkness* is packed with graphical, aural, and gameplay glitches. Slowdown occurs with jarring frequency. Sound effects drop in and out. There are misspellings in the dialogue text. And the game logic is nonexistent—why is it that I can kill a guard dog with a couple of kicks, but sixty bullets won't bring it down? New moves, ➤

Body by Tomb Raider

A puny girlie-girl at the game's outset, Lara can bulk up her upper- and lower-body brawn by shoving blocks and performing long-distance leaps—strength-blasting moves that increase her hang time from ledges and let her kick in doors. Core Design refers to this on-the-job fitness training as *Angel of Darkness*' role-playing infusion. But in reality, Lara's strength power-ups are just a thinly veiled twist on the old fetch-the-item puzzles. Stumble on a stubborn door, for instance, and chances are you just need to mosey around until you find a nearby crate, shove it two feet, and voilà—you instantly get the necessary boost in strength. At least Core deserves credit for evolving the ubiquitous crates from a bland puzzle piece into fitness equipment. Could a workout video be far behind?

I know Tae-Bo: Lara starts out sans guns, so she has to settle scores with her feet and fists. The bad guys' rag-doll animations make for silly-looking KOs.

Good: Sure looks nice
Bad: Catastrophic controls
Be Sure To: Save early, Save often

THE VERDICTS (OVERALL)

CRISPIN	ETHAN	GREG S.
5.0	2.0	7.0

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Core Design
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.tombraider.com

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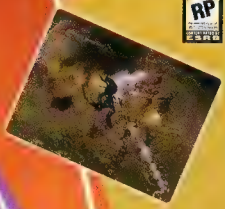


ALIENS VS. PREDATOR: EXTINCTION

Most titles these days feature one race, one group of weapons, and one planet. Aliens vs. Predator: Extinction, however, lets you control an Alien Hive, order a Predator Clan, or lead a crack squad of Colonial Marines. The goal? Nothing short of interplanetary survival. Each race has seven levels swarming with enemies that must be eradicated to be considered defeated. Each has its own characteristics and different styles of play. Want to go in guns blazing? Want to sneak up with Optical Camouflage and slice throats from behind? Or do you want to just overwhelm your foes by sheer numbers? Aliens vs. Predator: Extinction features 10 different unit types per race, including the never-before-seen Predator Hydra and Alien Ravager. What can they do? We could tell you, but then we'd have to kill you. There are 21 unique maps, ranging from what you'd expect of the movies: humid jungles, barren deserts, and high-tech laboratories where experiments went horribly wrong. With weaponry ranging from pulse rifles to exosuits, airstrikes and tooth and claw, Aliens vs. Predator has enough action to satisfy anyone's hunger.

BREAK OUT OF THE ORDINARY

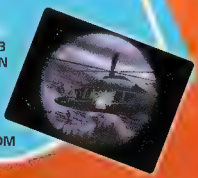
NEXT CODES

JAMES BOND 007 NIGHTFIRE

The following codes must be entered at the Passcode screen:
Unlock all multiplayer scenarios: GAMEROOM
Demolition mode: TNT
GoldenEye Strike mode: ORBIT
Protect mode: GUARDIAN
Uplink mode: TRANSMIT
Assassination mode: SCOPE
UNLOCK MULTIPLAYER CHARACTERS
Jaws: DENTAL
Oddjob: BOWLER
Xenia: JANUS
Goldfinger: MIDAS
Tuxedo Bond: BLACKTIE
Unlock all: PARTY

Alpine Escape: POWDER
Double Cross: BONSAI
Night Shift: HIGHRISE
Chain Reaction: MELTDOWN
Phoenix Fire: FLAME
Deep Descent: AQUA
Island Infiltration: PARADISE
Countdown: BLASTOFF
Equinox: VACUUM

Get all upgrades: Q LAB
Laser upgrade: PHOTON
Upgrade missiles: LAUNCH
Extra sniper ammo: MAGAZINE
Explosive scenery: BOOM



EVERY TRICKS

NFL BLITZ PRO

Like playing the all new and improved Blitz, but still long for the days of old? Worry no more—with only 10,000 credits, you can turn to the Blitz Shop and buy Blitz Classic and have the best of both worlds.

Tired of doing an octopus impersonation when you have to pile in a bunch of codes at the loading screen? Buy the Butterfingaz Secret Game Mode in the Blitz Shop for 50,000 credits to play the mode that only the Blitz coders knew about!

If you like the matchup of David Vs Goliath, you can play with three-inch dwarves versus 30-foot giants in a battle of speed versus brawn for 100,000 credits!

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DARE TO LOG ON TO BUTTERFINGER.COM

Why bother with all this sneaking around when Lara suffers no penalty for brazenly blowing away bad guys?

Unfinished Business

One leap of faith (above) landed Lara in a wall, while this brick wall's hollow backside (below) horrified a passing skeleton.

We lost count of how many times *Angel of Darkness* missed its release date, but now that the game has finally surfaced (in the final days, not coincidentally, of publisher Eidos' fiscal year), we reckon it needs a few more weeks under wraps. We've gotten stuck in walls and had our feet sink into floors. Stuttering visuals prompted passing *EGM*ers to ask, "Is Lara, like, supposed to be underwater?" And would it kill the designers to proofread the game's subtitles? Sure, we're being nitpicky, but such glitches are unforgivable in such a big-deal title.

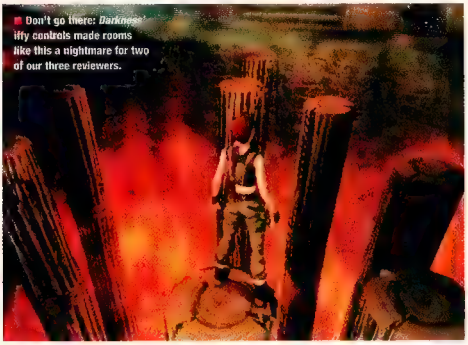
like stealth kills and melee punches, are a total joke. They're awkward, clumsy, and unnecessary. You don't need to worry about making noise or leaving bodies when enemies can't hear anything happening from more than three feet away, and thug corpses simply evaporate into thin air. The old moves are as robotic and frustrating as ever (particularly Lara's jumps—you're guaranteed to accidentally hurl yourself off hundreds of cliffs before the game is through).

Fanboys—like Greg Sewart—will insist that this is the best *Tomb Raider* since *TR2*, and I wouldn't disagree. But that doesn't mean *Angel of Darkness* is good—it just means the whole series has been crap since 1997. Clearly, a lot of real development time was poured into the game; its story is deep and involving, and the visuals are gorgeous. But who cares about pretty graphics and cool characters in a game that's absolutely no fun to play?

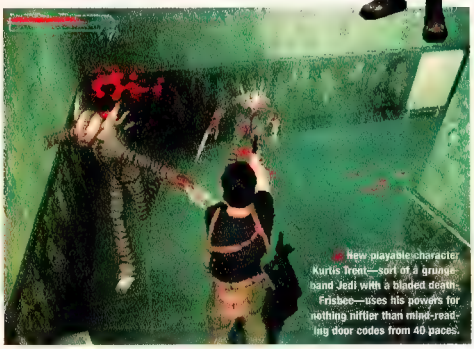
"...you're guaranteed to accidentally hurl yourself off hundreds of cliffs..."

GREG S: I bet Ethan wouldn't be half as tough on this game if it starred one of his idols, like Indiana Jones or Britney Spears. Yes, this series has sucked for a long time now. And yes, *Angel of Darkness* is a bit rough around the edges. But that's no reason to be so hard on it. I think the biggest problem is that the developers are trying to do too much here, and none of it comes together quite as well as it could. It's as if the game could have used a few more months' refinement.

That said, at its most basic level, this is a return to the original *Tomb Raider* formula that worked so well so many years ago. The levels are well designed and inventive, and Lara actually raids a tomb or two. There's very little fighting, and the puzzles are engaging and intelligent enough to keep me interested in the game. And the controls—despite Ethan and Crispin's whining—work great once you get used to them. Overall, it's simply a solid addition to the *Tomb Raider* legacy. Glitches? OK, I noticed a few, but not nearly the number that Ethan's talking about, and certainly not enough to keep me from playing.



Don't go there: *Darkness*' iffy controls made rooms like this a nightmare for two of our three reviewers.



New playable character Kurtis Trent—sort of a grunge-band Jedi with a bladed death Frisbee—uses his powers for nothing niftier than mind-reading door codes from 40 paces.

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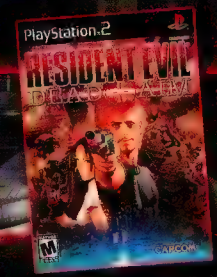

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GUNCON2

Blood and Gore
Violence

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Note to the developers: Boss battles are supposed to be fun. These sure aren't.

PS2 / Also On: None

RTX RED ROCK

SHAME OF THE MONTH

Mission to the Dread Planet

Good: Charismatic voiceovers
Bad: Whacked-out controls
Disturbing: When computer programs flirt with humans

BRYAN: Frustrating, tedious, asinine—these words come to mind when I think of *RTX Red Rock*. This is action-adventure gaming at its worst—rescuing a Mars colony besieged by (yawn) invading aliens has never been such a drag. You'll waste countless hours pondering how to complete unclear mission objectives, suffering through psychedelic computer puzzles, and dying incessantly against the game's tiny troupe of frustrating bosses. And your portable electronic sidekick isn't much help, 'cause she'd rather flirt with hero Wheeler (creepy!) than provide useful hints.

Even if you finally figure out precisely what to do to progress, good luck actually doing it. The debilitating, clunky controls had me spewing so many expletives in the heat of combat that passersby probably thought I had Tourette's syndrome. Plus, *RTX*'s visuals match the quality of the gameplay perfectly (i.e., they suck). Laughable character designs and chronic slowdown combine to offer what looks like a really bad *Toy Story* knockoff movie played in slow-motion on a broken VCR. To its credit, *RTX* does feature some great voice acting, but, well…that's about it.

PAUL: *RTX Red Rock* collects every major pitfall of action-adventure games into one convenient package. A broken lock-on system, difficult but dull jumping challenges, and endless fetch quests are just some of the reasons RTX had me seeing red. The game's voice acting is strong, and its style evokes the classic 16-bit sci-fi adventure *Flashback*, but it's hard to appreciate such details after dying 30 times fighting a boss you *cannot shoot at* because the designers thought defeating him with an inscrutable puzzle would be more fun. (It isn't.)

OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION MAG—GARY: Notice how our three scores all jive with each other? That's because *RTX* is objectively bad. There's simply no possible disagreement on that point. Paul and Bryan covered the egregious gameplay, so let me add a few words about the story: Clustered with clichés, haunted by gaping holes, inundated with inanity, *RTX*'s plot is worse than laughable. The lowest point? Early on, the game requires you to chat with a pile of invisible turd-shaped talking rocks—luckily our hero can see them, thanks to his custom eye attachment, whose only function seems to be spotting invisible turd-shaped talking rocks. Whatever.

Buzz Lightyear isn't amused by this.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

BRYAN	PAUL	GARY

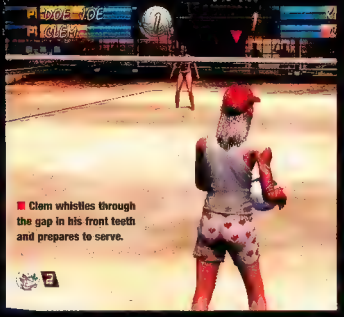
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: LucasArts
Players: 1 (1-2 in minigames)
ESRB: Teen

www.rtxredrock.com

Xbox / Also On: None (ONLINE)

OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL

Yep, it's officially a genre now



Clem whistles through the gap in his front teeth and prepares to serve.

Now that's good volleyball.

Good: Huge variety of gameplay modes
Bad: Stiff fighting, tiresome announcing
Go Into Options: And turn off fighting immediately. Trust us

CJ: If you were left limp by *DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*'s lack of a distinct goal, *Outlaw Volleyball* might rub you the right way. Its healthy variety of game types kicks sand in the face of most other v-ball titles, offering wacky events like a Casino mode (where you compete for a fat wad of cash), Hot Potato keep-away, and some bizarre drills, including one that's *Space Invaders* with volleyballs.

Its presentation is definitely slick (though not as purdy as beauty-queen-perfect *DOAX*), but it takes a disappointing dive in the gameplay department. The controls feel stiff and mechanical, the random fights that break out are laughably simple, and the camera leaves a lot to be desired. The available angles are either too zoomed-out or claustrophobic, putting the net in the way of the action. Xbox Live play is passable (if occasionally laggy), but its interface lacks the user-friendliness of newer titles. As a whole, *Outlaw* ain't the greatest volleyball game ever, but it does enough right to warrant a look.

SHAWN: *Outlaw* is trashy—think Bubba taking time out from airbrushing Civil War scenes on the side of his van to spike his nubile cousins—but being the only volleyball game to let you reunite the extended family online gives this tourney an edge. And even if you couldn't care less about getting connected, it plays quite well, its girls look good, and the training modes are second to none. Look past the low-brow trappings, and you'll find a kick-ass competition that's easy playing for parties yet complex enough to warrant practice.

XBN—GREG O: This is the way the ball bounces in the miscreant-laden *Outlaw Volleyball*: beautifully. There can be no faulting the game's sharply rendered and scantily clad characters (of both the male and female variety) or the oftentimes exotic settings they're dropped into for their rogue competitions.

Be sure to turn off the grating, repetitive play-by-play commentary, though; it will take a piece—and not a small one—of your soul. The complete lack of a customizable control scheme also cannot be forgiven. It's sand clogging the gears of what's otherwise a perfectly competent, if a bit over-the-top, spikefest.

This is how *OV*'s fighting looks. Now that you've seen it, turn it off and leave it off.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

CJ	SHAWN	GREG O.
7.0	7.0	6.5

Publisher: Simon & Schuster
Developer: Hypnotix
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Mature

www.hypnotix.com

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Somehow, we find it hard to believe that any martial art involves vomiting.

GBA / Also On: None

MORTAL KOMBAT: TOURNAMENT EDITION

A bloody average handheld fighting game

If anyone actually invites friends over and holds a tournament for this game, let us know.

Good: More fun than past GBA *Mortal Kombat* games
Bad: Then again, so is a root canal
Try Instead: *Street Fighter Alpha 3*

JOHN R: For me, *Mortal Kombat* has always been a classic case of style over substance. Unlike with most big-name fighting games, *MK*'s gameplay was never very deep or refined, but it was still compelling enough to grab my interest, at least for a short while. A lot of this was due to the fact that the fighters, locales, and overall aesthetics were always very appealing. Unfortunately, when you take all of that and shrink it down onto a tiny screen with a crappy pseudo-3D engine, washed-out graphics, and the most generic, inane characters since the birth of Internet fan fiction, the results aren't pretty.

To make matters worse, the controls are sluggish, and combos are difficult to pull off because of the GBA's tiny directional pad. Of course, if you've played *Deadly Alliance*, this shouldn't surprise you, as *TE* is essentially that game's "director's cut," adding in new characters and a couple of extra modes. On the good side, there's a load of bonus content to unlock, which'll keep loyal (and/or desperate) *MK* fans busy for weeks, but unless you're truly hardcore, I'd suggest you stick to a rental.

SHOE: *TE* is 50 times better than *MK Advance*, but what's 50 times zero (the score I gave that P.O.S.)? That's a rhetorical question, math whizzes, but this game still isn't that great. The ponderous gameplay is weaksauce compared to the GBA *Street Fighters*, and the new multiplayer modes (over predecessor *Deadly Alliance*) are buggy. *TE* deserves a few digits on the review scale, though. Unlockable characters, modes, and secrets abound, and, unlike John, I find that the moves and combos are rather easy to pull off.

JON D: I nearly OD'ed on *MK* and *MK2* in the arcade, yet I never got comfortable with the odd play mechanics and fugly new characters the jump to 3D brought. But this *MK* is the most palatable game since the 2D fighters. *TE* is a competent portable—it's playable with four buttons and a small D-pad, and it sports nifty unlockables. Admittedly, the fighters still look like failed glam/goth rock stars, and their special abilities fizzle on the small screen. But when it comes to 3D fighters on the go, I'd take it over GBA *Tekken* without hesitation.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)		
JOHN R	SHOE	JON D
		5.5

Publisher: Midway
Developer: Midway
Players: 1 (2-4 w/ Link cable)
ESRB: Mature

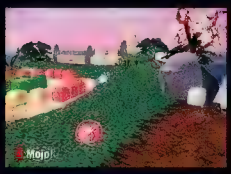
www.midway.com

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

A look at this month's less noticeable releases

Charlie's Angels

Grooverider: Slot Car Thunder



Mojo!

Pro Cast Sports Fishing

The Review Crew tries its damndest to review every game in a timely manner, but making space for the triple-A juggernauts means that room's tight for lesser titles. That's where this wrap-up comes in—here, we can take a quick look at the fanfare-free smaller games that are landing on store shelves. Sure, most of 'em suck royally, but once in a while you'll find a keeper.

Charlie's Angels

GC • Ubi Soft • ESRB: Teen — After critics have described the new *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* movie as "one of the worst things ever conceived by human hands," the tie-in game can only seem good by comparison. Well, while it's not exactly good per se, the rudimentary chop-sockey action, gaudy visuals, and dialogue clips from Lucy Liu, Cameron Diaz, and Drew "Chunky" Barrymore might keep your little sister entertained for the weekend.

Grooverider: Slot Car Thunder

Xbox, GC • Encore • ESRB: Everyone — Finally, a game for grandfathers and grandkids alike. *Grooverider* deftly mixes the unfathomable dorkiness of racing little cars stuck in grooves with radical modern-day stylings to create the year's most questionable racer. Mysteriously, the game's actually sort of fun—once you get past the sluggish graphics and *Club MTV* soundtrack, the racing's oddly addictive. We're as shocked as you are.

Mojo!

PS2, Xbox • Crave • ESRB: Everyone — Despite its exclamatory title, *Mojo!* is actually a rather relaxing experience. Gameplaywise, it's an amalgamation of two arcade classics, *Breakout* and *Marble Madness*—you control a ball as it busts through various colored blocks in a psychedelic world. Yeah, it might seem kinda like a shareware PC game, but hey, it only costs 10 bucks. At that price, it's a better value than *Enter the Matrix*, guaranteed.

Pro Cast Sports Fishing

Xbox • Capcom • ESRB: Everyone — We half expected our peaceful afternoon on the water to be shattered by ravenous undead carp in this first fishing game from *Resident Evil* developer Capcom. Alas, *Pro Cast* is an ordinary rod-and-reel RPG that has you entering tournaments, chatting up fellow anglers, and upgrading everything from your lure to your boat. Landing big ones isn't a breeze, though—even in the simpler Arcade mode.

Teed Off

This month, we missed out on reviewing ***Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour*** for the GC. Nintendo simply couldn't get a reviewable version to us in time. (It'll be out by the time you read this.) From what little we've played so far, we're quite impressed…so taking Princess Peach out for 18 holes is probably a safe bet.

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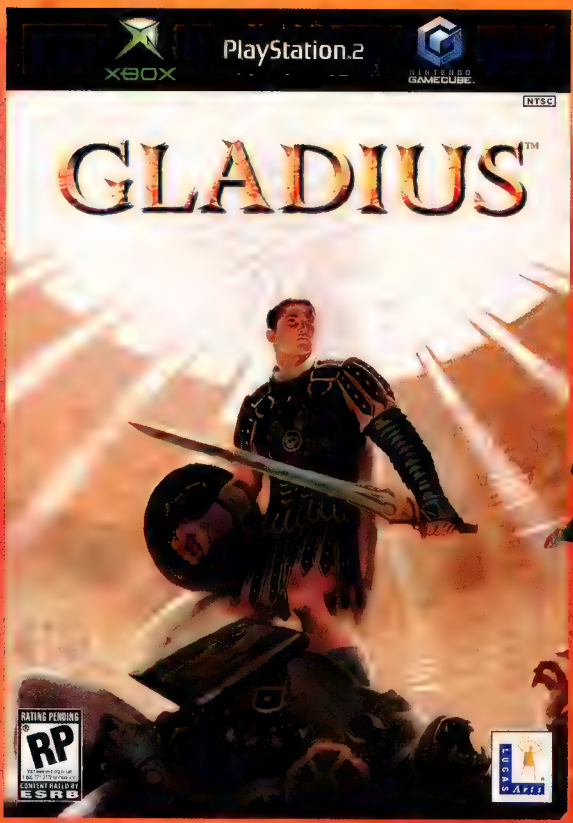

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REVIEW ARCHIVE

Glancing at games in the rearview mirror

.hack Part 2: Mutation PS2 (Also On: None) 6.0, 6.5, 8.0
■ An average RPG with a neat concept—you play in a virtual online world gone berserk

Ape Escape 2 PS2 (Also On: None) 8.5, 6.0, 7.5
■ Sure, it's a lot like its PS1 forerunner, but this sequel's still a top platforming banana

Apex XB (Also On: None) 8.0 Silver
■ You don't just haul ass in this racer—you build your own autos and run a car factory

Auto Modellista PS2 (Also On: None) 5.0, 5.5, 7.0
■ Crappy handling ruins a gorgeous-looking online racer

Batman: Dark Tomorrow GC (Also On: XB) 2.0, 1.5, 1.0 Shame
■ Gaming's answer to the box office hemorrhoid *Batman and Robin*

Big Mutha Truckers PS2 (Also On: XB, GC) 6.0, 7.0, 4.5
■ The lowbrow redneck angle belies some intricate big-rig shipping economics

Brute Force XB (Also On: None) 6.5, 6.0, 7.5
■ Microsoft's new squad shooter gets the job done, but not without casualties

Burnout 2: Point of Impact PS2 (Also On: XB, GC) 8.5, 8.0, 8.5 Silver
■ This version fixes a lot of the issues we had with the original

Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow GBA (Also On: None) 9.5, 9.0, 9.5 Gold
■ With its excellent soul-stealing system, *Aria* outclasses its forerunners

Chaos Legion PS2 (Also On: None) 8.5, 6.5, 8.5
■ More than mindless melees—allies that grow with experience add RPG-ish depth

Dark Cloud 2 PS2 (Also On: None) 8.0, 8.0, 9.5 Silver
■ An addictive action-RPG that lets you rebuild the world as you save it

Def Jam: Vendetta PS2 (Also On: GC) 7.0, 8.5, 7.5
■ Hip-hop stars and wrestling actually works. Word to ya mutha, yo

Devil May Cry 2 PS2 (Also On: None) 7.0, 7.0, 8.0
■ Dante and hottie-in-need Lucia blast through a cruddy plot in this too-easy sequel

DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball XB (Also On: None) 7.5, 8.0, 6.0
■ Scientists are working to invent a nude code for these bouncing she-ninjas

Downhill Domination PS2 (Also On: None) 8.5, 8.0, 7.0
■ Deftly mixes *Road Rash*'s two-wheeled combat with *SSX*'s crazy downhill drops

Dragon Ball Z: Budokai PS2 (Also On: None) 8.0, 7.5, 7.0
■ *Budokai* stands above any of the previous attempts to turn the series into a fighter

Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Battle 22 PS1 (Also On: None) 2.0, 1.5, 2.0
■ Someone crapped in a jewel case and passed it off as a *DBZ* game

Dynasty Warriors 4 PS2 (Also On: None) 7.5, 7.0, 8.5
■ Obese warlords in obscure settings snacking on dim sum and severing heads

Enter the Matrix PS2 (Also On: XB, GC) 6.0, 3.5, 3.5
■ More bugs than a slice of week-old pizza

greatest hit or miss?

■ PS2, Xbox, GC

CRASH BANDICOOT: THE WRATH OF CORTEX

■ Publisher: VU Games
■ Developer: Traveller's Tales
■ Originally Released: September 2002

Original Scores: 4.5, 4.0, 5.0 (PS2)
Crash's first next-gen outing didn't make much of an impression on our Review Crew back in the day—unimpressive graphics, never-ending load times, and a plethora of cheap deaths seriously drained the fun. For $20, your little bro or sis might dig it, but they deserve something better than dull mine cart levels, don't they?

EverQuest Online Adventures PS2 (Also On: None) 7.5, 5.0, 6.0
■ Ugly visuals hampered our online quest for fun

Evil Dead: Fistful of Boomstick PS2 (Also On: XB) 2.0, 3.0, 3.0 Shame
■ *Evil Dead* fans will definitely feel as if they're getting the fist with this game

Freestyle Metal X PS2 (Also On: XB, GC) 5.0, 4.5, 5.0
■ Regrettably, *X*'s average motocross action can't overcome its trailer-park trappings

The Getaway PS2 (Also On: None) 7.5, 6.0, 8.0
■ Looks like a *GTA* clone but plays like a Guy Ritchie flick, complete with naughty words

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City PS2 (Also On: None) 10, 10, 10 Platinum
■ As if you don't already know why this game received our highest award

High Heat Baseball 2004 PS2 (Also On: XB, GC) 9.0 Gold
■ The most realistic baseball sim on the market—period

Downhill Domination

Wario Ware

Hitman 2: Silent Assassin GC (Also On: PS2, XB) 7.0, 8.0, 8.5
■ Agent "Hairless Antihero" 47's contract kills are ingenious

The Hulk PS2 (Also On: XB, GC) 6.5, 6.5, 7.5
■ Does a marvelous job capturing this dark hero's destructive essence

Ikaruga GC (Also On: None) 8.5, 8.0, 8.0 Silver
■ One incredibly innovative, wickedly addictive shooter

Indiana Jones & the Emperor's Tomb XB (Also On: PS2) 5.5, 8.5, 8.5
■ Looks like Ms. Croft has some competition raiding tombs

K-1 World Grand Prix PS2 (Also On: None) 4.5, 6.0, 8.0
■ This bare-bones fighter will only ring your bell if you're a real K-1 fan

Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker GC (Also On: None) 9.5, 10, 10 Gold
■ You can't go wrong with *Zelda*'s gorgeous cartoon visuals and classic gameplay

Lord of the Rings: Fellowship XB (Also On: PS2) 3.5, 4.5, 3.0
■ True to the novels, but to the detriment of pacing and gameplay

Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color PS2 (Also On: None) 7.5, 8.0, 7.5
■ Homemade monsters add color to mundane battles

Mega Man & Bass GBA (Also On: None) 8.5 Silver
■ Introduces a second playable character to the side-scrolling classic

Midnight Club II PS2 (Also On: XB) 9.0, 8.0, 9.5 Silver
■ An unrelenting sense of speed and total disregard for realistic physics

Midtown Madness 3 XB (Also On: None) 7.0, 7.5, 7.5
■ A wacky, thrilling auto jaunt across Paris and Washington, D.C.

MotoGP 2 XB (Also On: None) 8.5, 8.0, 8.0 Silver
■ An intense, unforgiving, but ultimately satisfying crotch-rocket sim

NBA 2K3 PS2 (Also On: XB) 9.0, 9.5, 8.5 Gold
■ Another impressive showing strengthens *NBA 2K*'s rep as the *Madden* of b-ball

NBA Live 2003 PS2 (Also On: XB, GC) 8.0, 7.5, 9.0 Silver
■ An innovative control setup breathes new life into *Live*

NBA Street Vol. 2 PS2 (Also On: XB, GC) 9.5, 8.5, 8.5 Silver
■ A mix of both new- and old-school flava makes this baller a rockin' sequel

Panzer Dragoon Orta XB (Also On: None) 9.0, 8.5, 9.0 Silver
■ Most beautiful on-rails shooter imaginable, with a vast trove of amazing secrets

Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II XB (Also On: GC) 9.0, 9.0, 9.0 Gold
■ Still addictive, now with voices in your head

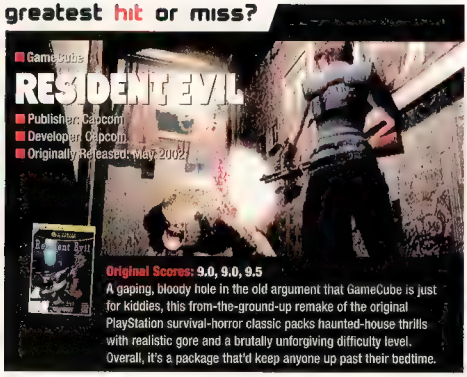
Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire GBA (Also On: None) 7.5, 6.5, 7.5
■ Pikachu and pals are back, but precious little has improved since *Gold/Silver*

Rent A Hero No. 1 XB (Also On: None) 6.5, 6.0, 4.0
■ Ever wished you could deliver Chinese take-out food? This is the game for you

Return to Castle Wolfenstein: TOW XB (Also On: None) 8.5, 9.5, 8.5 Silver
■ Online play is not only an utter blast—it's what you bought Xbox Live for

Return to Castle Wolfenstein: OR PS2 (Also On: None) 7.0, 6.0, 7.0
■ Xbox's multiplayer modes have gone AWOL, and that's a capital offense

greatest hit or miss?



Original Scores: 9.0, 9.0, 9.5

A gaping, bloody hole in the old argument that GameCube is just for kiddies, this from-the-ground-up remake of the original PlayStation survival-horror classic packs haunted-house thrills with realistic gore and a brutally unforgiving difficulty level. Overall, it's a package that'd keep anyone up past their bedtime.

Shinobi	PS2 (Also On: None)	7.5, 7.5, 7.0	
■ Slick bosses and perfect control thrill, but the difficulty cuts like a 3-foot Ginsu			
The Sims	PS2 (Also On: XB, GC)	9.5, 8.5, 8.0	Silver
■ Virtual soap opera teems with innovation and freedom			
Skies of Arcadia Legends	GC (Also On: None)	9.0, 9.5, 9.0	Gold
■ This phenomenal skyfaring quest is GC's role-playing savior			
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	XB (Also On: None)	6.5, 7.0, 3.5	
■ A dull parade of enemies too stupid to put up any real challenge in a fight			
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	XB (Also On: PS2, GC)	7.0, 7.0, 6.5	
■ Online support puts this prettier version parsecs beyond its PS2 and Cube cousins			
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	GBA (Also On: None)	8.0	Silver
■ How'd they miniaturize so much monkey mayhem?			
Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo	GBA (Also On: PS1)	9.0, 9.0, 7.5	Silver
■ A pixel-perfect port of the genre's crown jewel...and it's portable, to boot			
Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus	XB (Also On: None)	4.0, 6.0, 3.5	
■ Ineffective blocking and generic characters do not a quality fighter make			
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	PS2 (Also On: None)	7.5, 7.0, 7.0	
■ Ninjas rock, but somehow, a lackluster story and horribly stupid A.I. snuck in			
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	XB (Also On: PS2, GC)	8.0, 7.5, 8.0	
■ Team-based online squad combat and Xbox Live's first nearly killer app			
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	GC (Also On: PS2, XB)	8.5, 9.5, 9.0	Gold
■ The GBA radar is a nice addition, but Sam Fisher isn't as pretty on the purple purse			
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	GBA (Also On: All)	7.5	
■ Plays surprisingly like its console big brother and is nearly as fun			
UFC: Tapout 2	XB (Also On: None)	6.5, 6.0, 5.0	
■ Mixed martial-arts action will excite serious fans but bore everyone else			
Ultimate Muscle	GC (Also On: None)	8.5, 7.5, 7.5	
■ *Muscle* proves the WWE's meatheads aren't essential for videogame grappling			
Unlimited Saga	PS2 (Also On: None)	2.0, 4.0, 4.0	
■ Weird RPG that breaks so many rules that it just ends up feeling busted			
Wakeboarding Unleashed	PS2 (Also On: XB)	9.0, 8.0, 7.5	Silver
■ Set aside your extreme-sports snobbery and *Wakeboarding* may actually appeal to you			
Wario Ware: Mega Microgame$	GBA (Also On: None)	9.5, 9.0, 9.0	Gold
■ The most fun you can have in 3-second bursts			
Wario World	GC (Also On: None)	7.5, 7.0, 6.0	
■ A perilous journey only the most seasoned jumping-puzzle zealots will enjoy			
War of the Monsters	PS2 (Also On: None)	9.5, 6.5, 7.0	
■ Manages to make the woefully underrepresented monster genre fun			
World Series Baseball 2K3	XB (Also On: PS2)	8.0, 8.0, 8.0	Silver
■ *WSB* stands out with countless customization options and first-rate player models			
World Soccer Winning Eleven 6 Int.	PS2 (Also On: None)	9.0	Gold
■ Can this natural-feeling soccer sim take 2003 Sports Game of the Year?			
X2: Wolverine's Revenge	PS2 (Also On: XB, GC)	5.5, 5.5, 4.0	
■ A slight cut above most steaming coils of comic-book-based crap			
Xenosaga: Episode 1	PS2 (Also On: None)	8.0, 8.0, 6.5	
■ You don't so much play this RPG as watch its plot unfold in hours of cut-scenes			
Yu-Gi-Oh!: Duelists of the Roses	PS2 (Also On: None)	6.0, 4.5, 4.5	
■ Fans will love this confusing card battler. Everyone else, however, will abhor it			
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	PS2 (Also On: None)	7.5, 9.0, 8.5	Silver
■ Eye-popping pandemonium with a hairy-balled hero—no whiners this time			

10 ONLINE GAMES THAT GOT IT RIGHT

You could turn to page 92 to see what splendors the future of online gaming holds, but who wants to wait? Here are 10 groundbreaking titles that offer fantastic online action, and some titles are out now!

1 **SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals** — 9.0, 9.5, 9.5 — PS2 — Gold
This realistic squad-based shooter still has gamers headin' online to talk terrorist trash a year after its release

2 **Madden NFL 2004** — 9.5, 9.0, 9.5 — PS2 — Gold
Two essential new online features grace this year's PS2 *Madden* installment—voice chat and tourneys

3 **Return to Castle Wolfenstein** — 9.5, 8.5, 8.5 — XB — Silver
Activision's first-person shooter stresses teamwork, thanks to multiple character classes and Xbox Live chat support

4 **Phantasy Star Online Ep. I & II** — 9.0, 10, 9.0 — GC (Also On: XB) — Gold
Sega's pioneering RPG might not have a persistent world, but it does have stellar visuals, fun combat, and tons of junk to covet

5 **MechAssault** — 8.5, 9.0, 8.0 — XB — Silver
Lumbering around in giant mechs is far cooler when you're not the only one pivoting your axis on the battlefield

6 **Unreal Championship** — 8.5, 8.0, 9.0 — XB — Silver
You won't find a more frantic first-person shooter—go online and watch the sheer brutality of hyperactive combat

7 **NBA 2K3** — 9.0, 9.5, 8.5 — PS2 (Also On: XB) — Gold
The best Internet b-ball around, but remember—when playing online, it's never a good idea to fake the funk on a nasty dunk

8 **NCAA Football 2004** — 9.0, 9.5, 9.0 — PS2 — Gold
Online pigskin action in its purest form, but only for PS2 players—the XB and GC versions don't support Internet play

9 **Midnight Club II** — 9.0, 8.0, 9.5 — PS2 (Also On: XB) — Silver
Earn street cred against fast and furious online drivers. It's a lot cheaper than buying neon ground effects in real life, too

10 **Capcom vs. SNK 2: EO** — 7.5, 7.5, 9.0 — XB — Silver
Admittedly, your Dragon Punches and Spinning Bird Kicks might suffer a little Net lag, but it's still the only online fighter in town

A game so intense, graphics so real, you're gonna want to call someone.

Except you'd have to stop playing to do it.

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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

A SPECIAL EDITORIAL SUPPLEMENT WWW.WGAMER.COM

NIKKI AND

PANDEMONIUM RETURNS

ON NOKIA'S N-GAGE

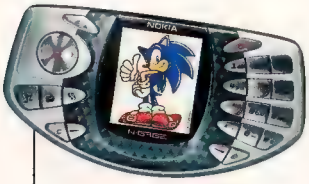
THE AUTHORITY ON CELL PHONE GAMING!

MULTIPLAYER MOBILE GAMES

BEJEWELED MULTIPLAYER
MGS KARTING

REVIEWS

BEJEWELED MULTIPLAYER
CHARLIE'S ANGELS: FULL THROTTLE
TWO CITIES



FEATURE:

NOKIA'S N-GAGE X-POSED
CELL PHONE, GAME DECK, AUDIO LOVE MACHINE

PLUS:
MORE N-GAGE TITLES TO LOOK FORWARD TO:
RED FACTION
SONIC N
TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

THE BEST PHONES TO GAME ON!

AND THE BEST GAMES TO GET!

INSIDE:

- **SUPER MONKEY BALL**
- BAKU BAKU
- **GROUNDER POUNDER**
- SIBERIAN STRIKE
- **MGS KARTING**
- SIBERIAN STRIKE
- **THE ITALIAN JOB**
- DURATRAX MOBILE RC
- **Q*BERT**
- SCOOBY-DOO

AND MORE!

WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

THE BIRTH OF MULTIPLAYER MOBILE GAMES

Like piano moving, drinking, construction, and sex, playing computer games is always better when you're doing it with someone else. Since the beginning, the promise of mobile games has been that they run on a networked device, so when you play, you can compete with other people. The universal hope was that you'd happily trade a smaller screen and limited sound for portability and multiplayer.

Some early WAP games were multiplayer, but they were also slow, expensive, and hard to enjoy. So, the promise was deferred until downloadable multiplayer games were available. Now they finally are.

Some of the currently available multiplayer mobile games are Java/WAP hybrids like Mobliss' *Jumble*. Some only use the network for refreshing the content, like *Wheel of Fortune* from Sony Pictures, or for posting high scores, like Hexacto's *Lemonade Tycoon*. But scores of mobile developers are building head-to-head or multiplayer contests that you'll see on your handsets soon enough.

Bejeweled Multiplayer from DemiVision/JAMDAT is the first game to fulfill the multiplayer mobile promise. You can read about it in this issue, but at press time it was only available for the Sanyo 8100 handset on Sprint. Other multiplayer options include Entelepon's *Tanks* (promised for the LG 4400 on Verizon), Noumena's *MGS Karting* (via Bluetooth), several upcoming N-GAGE games that will support both Bluetooth and GPRS multiplayer, Dwango's U.S. import of *Samurai Romanesque* (!), and games for mobile devices from Tapwave and TTPCom.

For game developers, there are real costs in making mobile games multiplayer. Operators have been hesitant to add the complexity of multiplayer to their networks and their marketing. But since our last issue (June 2003), momentum has definitely built behind multiplayer mobile games. By the time you read this, you could be playing one. And by the time our December supplement goes to print, your mom will be playing, too.

MATTHEW BELLOWS
PUBLISHER
WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

ABOUT THIS SUPPLEMENT

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THANKS TO: Joyce Xiong, Justin Hall, Joe Funk, and our sponsors

The *Wireless Gaming Review* supplement to *Electronic Gaming Monthly* and *Computer Gaming World* is published four times per year (March, June, September, and December). For advertising information, please contact matthew@wirelessgamingreview.com

TOP PHONES FOR GAMES

So, you're down with the phone gaming thing but don't know where to start? Here's a cheat sheet of the best phones for games, with one great game for each one to get you started.

VERIZON WIRELESS

LG VX4400

The VX4400 is popular with developers for its speed and responsiveness, but most important, it's the first phone on Verizon's Get It Now service to support simultaneous key presses—don't strafe without it! **http://wgamer.com/phone-89**

Why: Everquest: Hero's Call **http://wgamer.com/game-925**
How: http://wgamer.com/howto/verizon

SPRINT PCS

SANYO SCP-8100

It's new, small, and shiny, and it packs all the stuff you hope for in a cutting-edge phone: a big screen, vibrant color and sound, a built-in camera, and a host of other goodies. Java games run fast and smooth, and the WAP browser is the best we've seen. **http://wgamer.com/phone-137**

Why: Bejeweled Multiplayer **http://wgamer.com/game-1346**
How: http://wgamer.com/howto/sprint

AT&T WIRELESS

NEC 515

Yes, it's true—Japan gets all the good game gear first. Finally, the NEC 515 gives the West a taste of Japanese Java. With a second processor just for running downloaded apps, the 515 makes games scream, while the hi-res screen keeps them crispy. **http://wgamer.com/phone-91**

Why: Star Diversion **http://wgamer.com/game-1543**
How: http://wgamer.com/howto/att

T-MOBILE

NOKIA 3650

T-Mobile hasn't launched its game service as of press time, but that won't stop you from playing on the 3650. You can load games via WAP, infrared, or even Bluetooth, and there are some very impressive ones available from Handango (http://handango.com) and elsewhere. **http://wgamer.com/phone-52**

Why: MGS Karting **http://wgamer.com/game-1318**
How: http://wgamer.com/howto/tmobile

CINGULAR

NOKIA 3300

It looks odd, but the 3300's oblong case packs in an MP3 player, FM radio, full QWERTY thumbboard, and Nokia's Series 40 UI and Java engine. A removable MMC memory card lets you store up to 64 MB of tunes and games. **http://wgamer.com/phone-124**

Why: Charlie's Angels: Road Cyclone **http://wgamer.com/game-1345**
How: http://wgamer.com/howto/cingular

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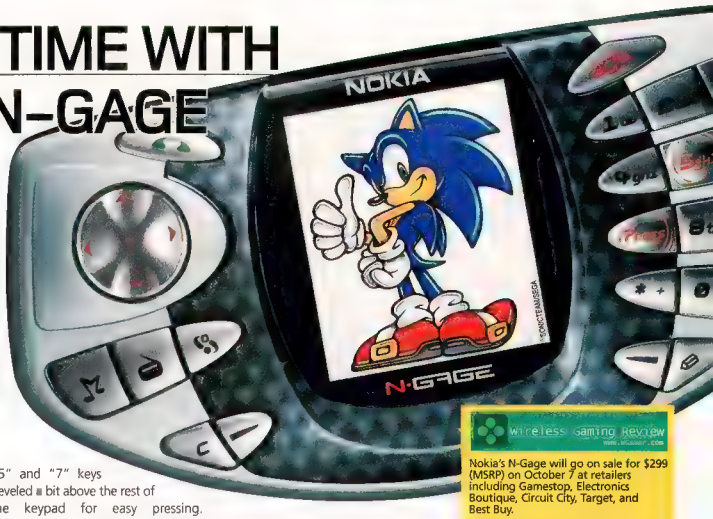
Multiplayer network gameplay and data transmission speeds dependent upon operator network capabilities and other conditions. Copyright (C) 2003 Nokia. All rights reserved. Nokia and N-Gage are trademarks or registered trademarks of Nokia Corporation. Bluetooth is a registered trademark of Bluetooth SIG, Inc. The Nokia N-Gage mobile game deck supports Bluetooth Specification 1.1 ("Handsfree Audio" and "Object Push Data" profiles. Contact the manufacturer of each Bluetooth device for information on compatibility. Other company names mentioned herein may be trademarks or trade names of their respective owners.

WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

QUALITY TIME WITH NOKIA'S N-GAGE



Somewhere between listening to its FM radio and piloting my primate in *Super Monkey Ball*, I fell in love with Nokia's N-Gage. An ambitious little handset, N-Gage ups the ante for mobile gaming and music, connectivity, and organization. Everyone from the young gaming nut to the business executive could benefit from this all-in-one device.

How the Device Fares:

The design philosophy behind the N-Gage is sound. The handset's look and feel is modeled after Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, which currently dominates the handheld market. The N-Gage's minor problems stem from Nokia's failure to achieve a balance between the needs of a mobile phone and a gaming platform.

As a Cell Phone

It's physically awkward to talk on the N-Gage unless you use Nokia's proprietary dual-input headset or its amazing two-way Bluetooth earpiece. The microphone and speaker are located on the side of the device, rather than on the back. Forget about cradling the thing between your head and your shoulder—it juts out at an odd angle from your ear.

As a Gaming Machine

The N-Gage sports a big, bright screen, and its vertical orientation doesn't bug me as much as I thought it would. Its fairly responsive and well-situated buttons support chording, with the "5" and "7" keys beveled a bit above the rest of the keypad for easy pressing. Surprisingly, after a little play, I didn't miss the shoulder buttons as dearly as I thought I would. However, the method for changing game cartridges is probably the N-Gage's biggest design flaw (see sidebar). You have to turn off the phone, open the back, pop out the battery, depress a little plastic tab, and slide in the cartridge. It's like having to change your PC's RAM every time you want to play another game. This type of oversight is an example of Nokia's newcomer status in the console manufacturing world.

As an Audio Love Machine

Using MMC cards as flash memory, the N-Gage can store and play MP3 files (transferred via the N-Gage's USB port) and record music directly from the built-in FM radio, a welcome bonus. Lack of an external antenna doesn't hurt phone reception, but it does seem to limit the N-Gage's RF reception. You can compose music using a built-in midi sequencer and write real sheet music, though only in the treble clef and only in preprogrammed time signatures. The music editor does, however, support thirds and staccato notes.

Instead of a standard 1/8th-inch headphone jack, the N-Gage uses two 2.5mm jacks—one for the phone headset and the other for stereo audio. While the device comes with a decent pair of earbuds and an attached omnidirectional microphone, sticking to the standard jack would have let me keep my Sony MDR 7506s, and would have avoided the annoyance of plugging the headset into the wrong jack.

Conclusion

The N-Gage has met with a torrent of skepticism from the same people who claim to be die-hard mobile gaming fans. This outcry may be a reaction to the intense hype, but it's unwarranted. The N-Gage is a first-generation device. Early adopters will have to deal with some mild annoyance, but the emphasis is on mild. With all that N-Gage offers, it's worth a serious look.

BY AVERY SCORE

wireless gaming review
www.wgamer.com

Nokia's N-Gage will go on sale for $299 (MSRP) on October 7 at retailers including Gamestop, Electronics Boutique, Circuit City, Target, and Best Buy.

FOR MORE ON THE N-GAGE
CHECK OUT
HTTP://WGAMER.COM/PHONE-67

THE N-GAGE UNCOVERED

The outside-the-box N-Gage

There's the cartridge

...must...pull out...battery

Unclip here to remove the cart

N-GAGE PREVIEWS

PANDEMONIUM

DEVELOPER: IDEAWORKS 3D PUBLISHER: EIDOS

In a world of complex cross-genre titles, *Pandemonium* is a pure platformer. There are no stats to tweak, no options to toggle. The emphasis is on speed not combat, even though the beautiful graphics might cause you to linger. Power-ups allow protagonist Nikki to shoot energy bursts, but you can either shoot or jump atop the unsuspecting heads of carnivorous plants and insects with relative ease. It's also possible to complete levels by developing the ability to float on moving rainbows, bound across chasms, and bounce on clouds.

Although *Pandemonium's* gameplay is decidedly 2D, its graphics are polygonal. *Pandemonium* would lose its fast-twitch appeal if you were constantly adjusting its fixed perspective. Besides, with destructible objects, colorful textures, and Nikki's good looks, *Pandemonium* does not lack visual appeal.

Unlike a lot of mobile games, *Pandemonium* feels like it was heavily play-tested. It's more polished than virtually any other mobile title. One level uses powerful gusts of air to boost jumps. The gusts had great animation and convincing sound and were just barely high enough to allow me to reach my goal. Even in an early alpha release, I could tell that the jumps were designed to test the limits of my skills without requiring innumerable attempts. Some of this ease comes from *Pandemonium's* PSX legacy. But Crystal Dynamics and Ideaworks 3D have demonstrated admirable attention to detail in bringing this title to N-Gage.

Pandemonium for N-Gage is not a perfect port from the PSX original. I was dismayed by the lack of BGM tracks and by the absence of Nikki's sidekick Fargus. Hopefully, these features will resurface in the final build.

Pandemonium's brilliant, highly varied level design, its fast-paced, thoroughly enjoyable game mechanics, and its sublime simplicity make it one of the best games on mobile. Well before its N-Gage launch date, *Pandemonium* feels streamlined and silky smooth.

For more on *Pandemonium*, visit http://wgamer.com/game/1301

SUPER MONKEY BALL

DEVELOPER/ PUBLISHER: SEGA

In 2001, Sega's *Super Monkey Ball* for GameCube took the world by storm. Its simple yet appealing gameplay and lovable ball-dwelling simian stars made it an instant classic. Fans have since been treated to a Cube sequel and several mobile iterations.

For those unfamiliar with the probably inhumane yet wonderfully enjoyable practice of rolling primates around in little glass balls, *Monkey Ball* is a variation on the old game of skill in which a player tilts a maze in various directions to move a steel ball through it. In Sega's version, the steel ball is replaced by four monkeys inside balls who roll with varying degrees of speed and balance through treacherous levels. Each level has a time limit, so *Monkey Ball* (played solely with the directional pad) forces you to find a happy medium between speed and cautiousness.

Of all mobile versions of *Monkey Ball*, N-Gage's comes closest to matching the nirvana-inducing original. It's graphically closer to its GameCube roots, pushin' polys and throwin' texels like it just don't care. With the addition of 3D, puzzles now pack depth to rival the console version. But improvements don't stop at graphics. When booting up *Monkey Ball*, my N-Gage pumped out hot breakbeats. Dieselboy, can we get the rewind?

The alpha version of *Monkey Ball* needs some work. Only the beginning mode (the first 10 levels) is playable, and the game crashes after you get through about eight levels. Also, the save feature doesn't work. These problems don't seem dire when you consider that Sega has till October 1 to fix them. Here's hoping it does.

Super Monkey Ball is a universally appealing game, and this is the best version yet. You'd have to be a member of the ASPCA to dislike it.

For more on *Super Monkey Ball*, visit http://wgamer.com/game/533

OTHER N-GAGE GAMES WORTH NOTING

RED FACTION II

(MONKEYSTONE/THQ)

John Romero's *Red Faction* is the shooter to watch.

http://wgamer.com/game/1298

SONIC N

(SEGA)

The blue man returns. Have a need for speed? Grab some rings and let Robotnik's goons eat your dust.

http://wgamer.com/game/1387

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

(NEVERSOFT/ACTIVISION)

Not liking this game would be harder than a 540-degree fakey. Hop shovit to indie impossible! Check it.

http://wgamer.com/game/1318

WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

WGAMER REVIEWS

BEJEWELED MULTIPLAYER

■ **PUBLISHER:** Jamdat ■ **DEVELOPER:** DemiVision
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT: **HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1346**

The basic rules are the same. Switch adjacent gems to create runs of three or more identical stones. With each switch, the string of identical gems disappears, the ones above the string drop down, and matching continues. Play lasts as long as your timer does; successful matches earn more time.

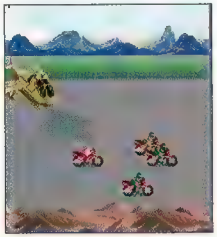
DemiVision and JAMDAT add three new wrinkles: It's multiplayer, it has bombs, and it lets you play anywhere.

In the two-player game, you challenge another player or take the first available opponent. You can play against the computer while you wait. Before you begin, you see your opponent's skill level and win/loss record. Your opponent's game appears in the right corner of your board. The timer shows both times remaining.

About those bombs: By placing special gems in strings, you earn Freeze, Zero-G, Crazy Keys, Cascade, and other bombs, each of which affects your opponent (and you) in different, disconcerting ways. The five-second aftermath feels longer because you can see your opponent clearing gems while you recover.

The tremendous novelty and variety of the bombs exemplify the kind of innovation that mobile gaming needs. While it could be easier to differentiate gems, Bejeweled Multiplayer is closer to realizing the gaming potential of the mobile phone than any other title available. You will be amazed at what a mobile phone can do.

WGAMER RATING:



CHARLIE'S ANGELS: ROAD CYCLONE

■ **PUBLISHER:** Centerscore ■ **DEVELOPER:** Sony Pictures
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT: **HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1345**

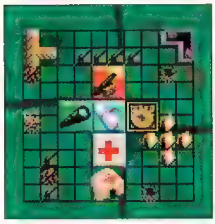
Charlie's Angels: Road Cyclone, like its namesake, is a guilty pleasure. You are a motorcycle-riding Angel on a horizontally scrolling highway: Sandra is the fastest, Mira the most agile, and Hope the toughest. Biker thugs try to kill you. Angels rely on wits and luck, not firepower, so you dodge grenades and get bikers to shoot each other while using ramps to jump over and on top of them.

The baddies are not very smart. They're also wimpy, and they're bad drivers. But there are a lot of them, and their bosses lurk at the end of each level. Also, you must destroy a strafing helicopter and a monster 18-wheeler by knocking enemy motorcycles into them.

Gameplay is consistently smart and augmented by several unique elements. You can use the bikers' wreckage to crash other thugs. Or bump them into ramps and knock them off their bikes. Best of all, recharge your health by jumping onto an unoccupied motorcycle—just like in real life!

This driving game has it all: action, sass, sex, absurdity, and several twists. Unfortunately, CARC is short, and it would be nice to see more bosses, smarter enemies, and crazier maneuvers in additional levels. But that's the way it goes in summer movie tie-ins.

WGAMER RATING:



TWO CITIES

■ **PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER:** Sony Online
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT: **HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1319**

Two Cities puts you in your dream role: totalitarian dictator. Everything is yours to command, unless the ruler of the neighboring city destroys it.

Shoot cannons to obliterate your opponent's resources while protecting your own. Improve your chances of scoring by scouting enemy territory. If an infantry member is hit, heal him in your infirmary. Losing healing ability puts you at a disadvantage, so eliminate your rival's infirmary early while protecting your own as long as possible.

It can take several hits to take a unit down; during this time, your rival can heal or move the unit. You must spend a turn to "update" your map to find out.

Two Cities would lend itself well to multiplayer. The amount of strategy involved can be intense, and a well-planned attack is immensely gratifying. A game can take 25 minutes to complete, and playing against the computer gets boring. The two-player mode involves swapping one handset back and forth; but it is unlikely that most of your buddies would be willing to put up with that for long. "Come on, man! Press, press, pass! You're screwing up the rotation."

Playing against the A.I. is a pleasure; it's just not nirvana-inducing. Had multiplayer been an option, Two Cities would have received a top score.

WGAMER RATING:

GREAT GAMES FROM YOUR CARRIER

SPRINT

■ Ground Pounder (Cybiko)
If you like shooting machine guns and throwing grenades at tanks and enemy troops (and, really, who doesn't?), you'll love Ground Pounder. Intelligent level design and dead-on gameplay mechanics make this title a winner.

■ Baku Baku (Sega)
A beastial Puyo Puyo, Baku Baku puts you in the role of Piggy, a girl who aspires to be the royal zookeeper. Pair animals with their favorite foods as they fall from the top of your screen. Compete against a CPU opponent who is trying to do the same. If you clear two or more blocks at once or clear many blocks through a chain reaction, you drop blocks on your opponent. A terrific title.

■ Pengo (Sega)
True to its arcade heritage, mobile *Pengo* is clever and challenging. There's no music, but it's worth a download.

CINGULAR

■ Siberian Strike (Gameloft)
Hop into your fighter plane to take out the evil Stalinka Corp, a Russian vodka manufacturer bent on world domination. Stalin-bot, their "drunk on power" robot, has created vodka that destroys the ability to resist communist control. Intense graphics make this game worth a second mention.

■ MGS Karting (Noumena Productions)
It's Mario Kart, but with better graphics and Bluetooth support! While the concept might be old hat, the great presentation and multiplayer support is novel.

■ The Italian Job (Mforma)
Finally, a licensed game that doesn't suck. Drive around GTA style, blowing up cars and ferrying gold bouillon to the train station. It's short—but challenging and fun while it lasts.

VERIZON

■ Duratrax Mobile RC (Sorrent)
This graphically rich remote-controlled car racing simulation features great collision detection and damage modeling. The problem is the unbalanced car options. Different cars represent difficulty levels, not different play styles.

■ Charisma Lee (Mdream / Jamdat)
It may be whack-a-mole in a pretty package, but its strange dialogue and oddball charm wins it a place in our hearts.

■ Q*Bert (Centerscore/Sony Pictures)
One of the best titles of the retro rush. For the uninitiated, Q*Bert is a game of skill in which you must hop from block to block, changing each of their respective colors as you go. The challenge is to avoid falling off the edge or hitting the baddies.

AT&T

■ Prince of Persia (Gameloft)
Action! Platforming! Oriental despotism! You are fighting to save seven hot honeys from the head honcho's harem. That's right, the sultan's babes have been kidnapped. Get his girls back before his pimp hand atrophies.

■ Gulo's Tale (Gameloft)
What's a platform without a platformer? Gulo's tale melds classic action with stunning visuals. Guide Gulo on fruit-gathering missions, dodge enemies, and occasionally dispatch them with Gulo's bubble-blowing technique.

■ Scooby-Doo: Jeepers Creepers (IOMO/Digital Bridges)
It's a survival-horror title! No, it's a driving sim! Hide from a ghost in a haunted mansion and uncover clues. Guess the identity of the perp, then hit the highways for a fast-paced chase! Scooooooby Snack!

ABOUT WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

In August 2001, we started Uplevfest, which is completely dedicated to mobile games and mobile game devices. Now, through a partnership with Ziff Davis, we're able to bring the biggest core-est gamer audience information about our main addiction. Let us know what you think! E-mail any of us at the addresses below.

MATTHEW BELLOWS: Woven from the golden cross of a giant spider, Matthew helped start WGR after playing in Game's Data Clash.

CASHMAN ANDRUS: When the codes, the gods call lightning from the sky. Cashman started *WGR* with Matthew instead of turning to a life of crime.

AVERY SCORE: With the looks of Camui Gackt, this self-proclaimed otaku has no trouble getting a seat in the local food court.

AMY MONAGHAN: There are no other Christmas tree decorating parties like hers, and to Amy, Independence Day is a week-long bacchanalia.

tricks of the trade

tactics, codes, and secrets for your favorite games

trickster

Flippin' typical, innit? You wait and wait for an oft-delayed but supposedly genre-defying videogame to come out, and then two of them arrive at once! Did *Knights of the Old Republic* or *Tomb Raider* win us over? You decide. And it's a "Banner" month for cheat device codes. Hodgson smash!!

—David S. J. Hodgson
tricks@ziffdavis.com

e3 excitement

At this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, we saw more games than you can shake a stick at. We know what our favorites are, but what are yours? **"Which game shown at E3 are you most excited about?"**

4%	*SOCOM 2*
6%	*Gran Turismo 4*
21%	*Mario Kart: Double Dash*
25%	*Metal Gear Solid 3*
41%	*Halo 2* WINNER!

Source: Gamers.com poll, May 2003

TRICKS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIMA GAMES

These fine strategies are excerpts from Prima's guides to *Knights of the Old Republic*, *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*, and *Wario World*. If you're excerpt-phobic, look for the guides themselves at your local gaming emporium.

■ Xbox

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Geek heaven: a 50-hour role-playing game set in a galaxy far, far away. With lightsabers! But geek heaven can turn into geek hell if your crew of motley reprobates keeps getting killed at the hands (not to mention the blasters) of the Sith. Does Carth Onasi keep falling over in the combat zone? Is Bastila attempting to thwart Dark Jedi with a vibroknife?

You need a serious equipment makeover, young Jedi. Check out our complete overhaul of some of the main party members. For advice on improving and outfitting the rest of your crew, check the Prima guide.

■ Bastila Shan will tolerate no back talk from droids. That's just how she was raised.

Carth Onasi

Carth is a basic human soldier. He can wear any kind of armor he desires, but he has no special skills to make him stand out from your more flamboyant crew members. Because Carth isn't the most impressive melee fighter, invest in his pistol skill as soon as possible and choose feats to accommodate his pistol-packing. Two-weapon fighting and improved two-weapon fighting will allow Carth to wield double pistols like Chow Yun Fat, but in space.

Don't place him in harm's way. Let Carth stand away from combat and blast with both barrels. Allow him to cultivate a pistol collection. Consider giving him an added bonus with the rapid shot skill, although this lowers his defense.

Equipping Guide

Carth starts with his own weapon (Carth's Blaster). It's a good weapon that becomes more impressive the further you upgrade it. Do not replace this weapon, as it can be made into one of the finest guns around. Place a second pistol in Carth's other hand, like Bendak Starkiller's Pistol, which is also upgradeable. Get your parts together and start modifying!

Carth can be clad in any armor. If you keep him out of melee combat, he can get away with moving a bit slower. Try shoehorning him into Mandalorian Battle Armor (unless you're using Canderous). However, Carth starts with a reasonable dexterity, so don't fit him with armor that's so heavy it negates his dexterity modifier. Instead, put him in Davik's War Suit or, for the ultimate look, the Echani Battle Armor. A great armor find early in the game is the Republic Mod Armor. It's upgradeable!

Carth has no access to implants unless you're willing to gain the necessary feats, so concentrate on his regular equipment. Fit him with belts that help his will save bonus or those that will protect him against mental force or stun effects. For his headgear, choose any item with a will save bonus. Try to find him some gauntlets with a dexterity bonus. They'll help with reflex saving throws, ranged attack bonuses, and defense.

■ In a galaxy far, far away, Carth is "the streetwise one" in a boy band called 2 Far From U.

Bastila Shan

Bastila is a good choice for close combat. She carries a double lightsaber, an upgradeable combat weapon you should let her keep unless you want your main character to wield it.

Unfortunately, Bastila's strict Jedi code and Force powers do not allow her to wear armor. Unencumbered, she does move quickly, but she's vulnerable to attack. To offset this weakness, place the attribute bonus she receives every four levels into dexterity, which will help her defense.

When you meet her, she can level up immediately. Choose the light-side cure Force power for Bastila, since her default combat intelligence is to autoheal as long as she has enough Force points. Cure affects all three team members. That'll save you credits on medpacs.

Her specialty is melee attack, but her power and constitution aren't as impressive as Zaalbar's, meaning she can't absorb the sort of damage the Wookiee can. So send her into the fray, but

make sure she doesn't get caught in the middle of a hostile mob.

Bastila isn't a scout, so she has no implants (unless you buy into that line of feats). She has no extraordinary skills, except her healing. Pump all your available points into light-side powers since she leans that way already; moving her to the dark side (via offensive Force power acquisition) costs too many Force points.

Equipping Guide

Since she can't wear armor, you have one choice: locate and don Jedi robes as soon as possible.

Never change her double lightsaber, since it's impressively upgradeable (like all lightsabers). Affix bondar crystal to her weapon for a stunning special ability: 10 percent of the time she hits, her enemy must make a low difficulty save or be stunned for six seconds. It doesn't sound like much, but it pays off relatively often. Also look for damind crystal, which will boost both her attack bonus and the damage she deals. Remember that all of the crystals you collect should be shared among your Jedi close-combat specialists (Bastila, Juhani, optionally your own character, but not Jolee, as he isn't much of a melee fighter).

Bastila's face should be covered by a mask of some kind, such as the Verpine Headband, which increases her will save bonus. The ultimate headgear is the Circlet of Saresh (+5 wisdom against Force powers), a unique item which serves Bastila well. Place any gauntlet on Bastila that adds to her dexterity, which will help her dodge attacks. Belts should help her fortitude: try the cardio-regulator, and later into your adventure, fix her with the adrenaline stimulator (+2 dexterity, +4 all saving throws). Finally, tie shields on her arm slots since these can be used by any character except Zaalbar.

■ Zaalbar, watch out! For the love of the Force, Wookiee, look behind you!

Zaalbar

This walking carpet may come with a bowcaster (a Wookiee weapon that acts like a blaster rifle), but his incredible strength and constitution statistics mean he's best used as a melee monster. He has a huge number of hit points, and his tremendous strength means he inflicts bonus damage with melee weapons. So why keep him at the back as a ranged fighter? His innate species skill, Wookiee's toughness, also helps him at close quarters. This skill negates the first couple of damage points he receives. By now it should be clear that he belongs in the thick of the fray.

Of course, his hair and culture do not allow him to wear any type of armor (not even arm shields), and his armor class isn't as high as other party members', but his brute force more than makes up for that.

Drop all necessary points into combat feats, such as melee focus and proficiency. Then move on to the flurry line of skills, which give additional attacks per round. Better yet, invest in two-weapon feats for Zaalbar so he can dual-wield the powerful swords found throughout the game. Unlike Canderous, Zaalbar cannot regenerate during combat, so keep an eye on him and heal him as needed.

Because he's a scout, he can and should receive feats that allow implants. Since he can't wear body armor, equip Zaalbar with dexterity implants to raise his defense. Of course, you *could* follow the bowcaster line of skills, but this is nowhere near as effective as capitalizing on his close-quarters skills. Put off using Zaalbar until he obtains a few combat feats. Then bring him out to cleave and rend.

Equipping Guide

Zaalbar can't wear body armor, so be sure to equip him with Brejik's Arm Band and Belt for +5 resistance to slashing and bludgeoning damage, respectively.

Concentrate on his close-combat fighting. Zaalbar's first melee weapon should be the prototype vibrosword you find on the *Endar Spire*. It's only a little better than a regular vibrosword, but it's upgradeable with parts. Buff up the weapon with the vibration cell upgrade (+1 slashing), the durasteel bonding alloy (+1 attack), and the energy projector (+2 attack bonus, +1 slashing damage).

When you reach Kashyyyk, seek out Bacca's Ceremonial Blade. This culturally significant weapon isn't too powerful at first, but it's positively monstrous with the right upgrades! Perhaps the best weapon for Zaalbar is Yusani's Brand, a double-bladed vibrosword with two attacks per round. ➤

STEPPING OUT OF THESE PAGES AND INTO YOUR HOMES!

Join Shoe and the rest of the Game Group editors as they invade your screen with the latest game news and releases that will jumpstart your weekend!

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Big Video Game Hunting CNN HeadlineNews

HOTWIRED's Big Video Game Hunting hosted by Erica Hill on CNN Headline News.

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA GAME GROUP

VS.

Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick (PS2)

Lost in Dearborn? Of course you are. These developers' codes might help you out. Take a look at the game's levels through the designers' eyes. Still stuck? Vent your frustration like Zeus does: throw some thunderstorms about.

Enable Cheats (enter this first)
0E3C7DF21853E59E
EE9D5B7ABCCA360A

Show Path
FE942C85BCA99B84

Display Enemy Action
FE942C87BCA99B03

Thunderstorm
CE9802E2BCA99B84

Clear Skies
CE9802E2BCA99B83

Ambient Fog
CE9802EEBCA99B84

No Fog
CE9802EEBCA99B83

Strong Winds
CE9802EABCA99B84

No Wind
CE9802EABCA99B83

Raimi-Vision
FE942C84BCA99B85

Display Coordinates
CE9802DABCA99B84

■ The Show Path cheat in action. "Look what I got," quips Ash.

The Hulk (PS2)

How does the Incredible one feel about cheating? We reckon he's too dim to understand the concept. In other words, he's cool with it.

Check out all these "infinite" codes. Enter all of them at once to enable "Infinite SMASH" mode! Plus, good news for color-haters: GameShark can instantly unlock Gray Hulk, one of the game's hidden extras, with no fuss or bother. (But what do you have against green? It's the color of go!)

Enable Cheats (enter this first)
F455B60A FE3CC51E

Infinite Rage
248106BA 3436826D
24991EBE B41EC35D
249816A8 A53483CE

Infinite Time
24901428 34B4518C

Infinite Continues
2510156A 16F0D30C

Infinite Health
24D8B6A8 8674C502
24D8B6A8 4664C52A
24C5BE22 976EC412
24DBBE9C 065DC539
24911068 123641CC

Exclusive! In-game Cheats Activated: Gray Hulk Unlocked
25D0B068 16344318
2550B068 16344338

Exclusive! In-game Cheats Activated: Puzzle Solved
25D09368 16345108
25509368 16345128

■ PS2

SILENT HILL 3

***Silent Hill*'s freakish deviance remains unsurpassed in videogame history. We remember a preview version of the original *Silent Hill* in which defleshed devilish schoolchildren were bludgeoned to death with a hammer. Strangely, Konami cut that part of the game before its release.**

But we digress. Enjoy these codes and tricks for the newest installment in Konami's survival-horror series.

Firepower

Here's how to obtain the three most devastating weapons in *SH3*. First, finish the game and save your results.

If you dispatched most of your foes by shooting them, your reward is the flamethrower. If you hacked them to bits with melee weapons, the beam saber will be unlocked.

So you have one special weapon already. To get the other one, play through the game again and change your tactics. If you used mostly guns the first time, use melee attacks this time around. If you were a brawler before, focus on shootin'.

To unlock the unlimited submachine gun (which has infinite ammo), kill off Claudia using only melee weapons.

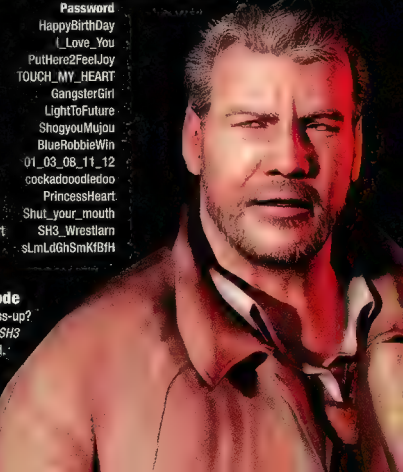
Bonus Costumes

These duds are even more bizarre than *Resident Evil*'s unlockable "hooker cowgirl" outfits. To access the bonus costumes, you'll need to complete the game. Then select the newly unlocked Extra Costume option and enter these case-sensitive passwords. Check out these wacky threads.

Costume	Password
Heather Shirt	HappyBirthDay
Onsen	I_Love_You
Block Head	PutHere2FeelJoy
Don't Touch	TOUCH_MY_HEART
God of Thunder	GangsterGirl
The Light	LightToFuture
Transience	ShogyouMujou
Killer Rabbit	BlueRobbieWin
Royal Flush	01_03_08_11_12
Golden Rooster	cockadooodledoo
Transform Costume	PrincessHeart
Zipper	Shut_your_mouth
Game Reactor T-shirt	SH3_Wrestlarn
Play-shirt	sLmLdGhSmKfBfH

The Konami Code

Tired of playing dress-up? Now you can see a *SH3* character undressed. Unfortunately, it's Douglas. First, finish the game. Then scroll down to Extra New Game on the Main Menu, and press Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, Circle, X. Yes, it's the fabled Konami code! Did you succeed? If you did, Heather will sigh when you choose the combat and riddle difficulty level. As you make your way through the game, Douglas will wear nothing but his undergarments in some cut-scenes. Now that's frightening.



■ Lara's turn-ons: lasers, shiny marble floors, and fingerless gloves.

■ PS2

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Do we dare to imagine jumping across the game's deadly fissures without dying dozens of times? We *dare*. Here are 10 ways to avoid *Angel*'s frustrations.

10. Turn with the Camera

Turning with the left analog stick is a pain, but there's a better way: Press forward on the left stick and maneuver the camera (and Lara) with the right. This way, you have much more control.

9. Jump and Hit Walls

Leap at a wall, hit it, and slide down onto a ledge. This technique will save you hours of maddening trial-and-error jumping, especially when guiding Lara over gaps of indeterminate distance.

8. Close in for the Kill

Don't be shy. Boldly sprint into close quarters and fire. You will save on ammo, spend less time fighting, and generally feel better about yourself.

7. Confuse Your Foe

Your enemies have restricted vision and don't cope well if you circle them. Use this to your advantage.

6. Record Cabal Codes

Every number puzzle in the game has a five-digit solution. Whenever you see a five-digit number, jot it down—you'll be using it soon.

5. Talk to Everyone

Talk to anyone who isn't trying to kill you and always save your game before you do in case the conversation goes awry. For example, Margot Carvier gives you a notebook if you answer a few questions, but she's easily insulted.

4. Doors to Nowhere

Most of the doors in Paris and Prague don't lead anywhere. If a door is jammed, sealed, or doesn't display the hand icon, ignore it. Make a note of doors that Lara cannot yet kick open and return to them later when she's stronger. Locked doors require keys, which are usually nearby.

3. Puzzle Proximity

When a puzzle requires a specific item, the object in question is probably close, usually within two or three rooms of the puzzle. Search the immediate vicinity.

2. Have Gun, Will Travel

Carry your weapons out of their holsters. If foes appear, Lara auto-targets them before you spot them (even if they're offscreen because of the uncooperative camera).

1. Save, Save, Save!

Remember to save your progress before you enter an ominous room, prior to engaging an enemy, and most of all, just before a jump of unknown distance. And once you've done a thing right, save it so you won't have to reprise the feat after Lara's next death. ➤

OCTOBER 2003.
IT'S COMING.

FINAL FANTASY: UNLIMITED

WWW.ADVFILMS.COM

Final Fantasy: Unlimited © Square Enix•TV Tokyo•Denisu•FF:U Production Committee

■ GC

WARIO WORLD

Wario. He's cooler, fatter, and sports a fluffier moustache than Mario. His latest game is supremely entertaining but drastically short. We heard some of you were peeved with *Wario World*'s difficult boss fights. Well, relax. We're here to relieve you peeved peeps with some sound advice for laying low these large lunatics.

Excitement Central: Dinomighty's Showdown

This huge green dinosaur isn't the sharpest tool in the shed. He has only a few attacks, and their patterns are easy to spot. It's easy to avoid Dinomighty when he tries to jump on you. Just be ready to jump over the shockwave he sends out when he lands.

When Dinomighty sees you, his eyes begin to glow red. This means his tongue attack is coming. Immediately run to one side and his tongue will lick air, not you.

Avoid these attacks, get behind the large green boss, and jump onto the Glue Globe at the end of his tail. Eventually, he will lift his tail and turn his head to see you. Now is your chance to attack! Jump off his tail and perform a Ground Pound directly onto Dinomighty's giant head. Stunned, he drops a bunch of gold coins. Quickly collect the loot, run up to the stunned green giant, and pick him up. Now execute a Piledriver to smash his head into the ground. Or you can Power Throw Dinomighty into the nearby lava. Five Piledrivers or Power Throws defeat the beast. Excellent work!

Spooktastic World: Dual Dragon's Showdown

Dual Dragon is a formidable foe, but he's easily vanquished with the following sneaky techniques.

Dodge his fire-breathing attacks by running sideways. His spiked tails do a fair amount of damage, but they have a very limited range, so it's easy to stay outside their reach. When Dual Dragon spits Glue Globes, be ready to jump. As long as you keep jumping off the Globes, you never have to worry about being pulled into his mouth and chewed up.

To damage Dual Dragon, you must trick him into attacking himself. But how? Run right up and deliver a party platter of knuckle sandwiches to one of Dual Dragon's heads. Thrash the head with Wario's fists until it loses consciousness and droops down to the ground.

While that head is out cold, the other may foolishly attempt its fire-breathing attack. When this happens, the stunned head won't be able to dodge the incoming fire as it usually does. The boss loses one health skull each time he accidentally burns himself. This is the only way he can be damaged, so just keep smacking one of the heads into slumberland and let DD defeat himself.

■ Wario is hugging 'n' huffing Glue Globes like they're going out of style.

■ What's that, Red-Brief J? You've lost your balance? Lemme help you with that.

Thrillsville Red-Brief J's Showdown

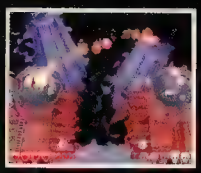
Unlike most other bosses, this nasty brief-wearing bull is completely immune to Wario's powerful punches. Don't even bother punching or otherwise attacking Red-Brief J. Instead, keep your distance and keep moving, avoiding his various attacks. Occasionally, he'll crash straight down onto the floating arena, dunking it into the lava. When this happens, keep Wario out of the hot liquid magma by jumping just before J hits the ground.

Red-Brief J's one weakness is his multiple charge attack. (He begins with one charge and adds one more for every health point he has lost.) Dodge each sally until the attack ends (yelling "Toro!" is completely optional). After his final charge, Red-Brief J teeters on the edge of the arena, right near the lava! Who's that knocking? Opportunity! Perform a Ground Pound at the top of the platform to topple the off-balance bull into the boiling lava. Dunk Red-Brief J five times, and he shall trouble you no more.

Sparkle Land: Captain Skull's Showdown

Captain Skull is a pushover at first. Just get close to him and punch away until he becomes stunned. Then pick him up and execute a painful Piledriver to eliminate one of his five health skulls.

After you have done this three times, Captain Skull suddenly becomes much more difficult to stun. He now blocks all of your punches with his arm cannon. To finish him off, you'll have to throw something at him—like his own cannonballs.



When Skull climbs one of his ship's two lookout towers, bounce up to the top of the other one using the glowing energy rings. Your adversary will eventually fire a volley of flaming cannonballs at you. Stay at the front edge of your perch, and these projectiles should sail overhead and land behind you. Let the cannonballs cool, then grab one and Power Throw it right upside the captain's head. While he's stunned, use the energy rings to bounce across to his tower. (Use Wario's shadow as a guide while you're airborne.) Then pick up your woozy foe and deliver a Piledriver.

Repeat this strategy until Captain Skull yields like a big ol' pirate crybaby. Four down, one to go.

■ To defeat the sleepy jewel, play duck-duck-goose with the crystals.

Final Boss: Evil Black Jewel

The evil black jewel hovers high above the center of the circular arena, completely out of reach. In order to bring it into pummeling range, release the five imprisoned Spritelings from their crystals around the arena's perimeter.

Run around the outside of the circle, using the Dash Attack for extra bursts of speed. Shatter each Spriteling's crystal cage as you go. Each Spriteling you set free will attack the jewel. When the fifth and final Spriteling hits the evil black jewel, it drops to the ground, stunned. Give the jewel a Piledriver.

Repeat this tactic seven more times. (Don't forget to use the Dash Attack for extra speed as you run seven laps around the arena.) Congratulations, you've defeated the evil black jewel and finished *Wario World*. For more fun with Nintendo's greedy little curmudgeon, check out *Wario Ware Inc.: Mega Microgame$* for Game Boy Advance. Trust us.

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From the Editors of
Electronic Gaming Monthly
Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
Computer Gaming World
GameNOW and Xbox Nation

THE REST OF THE CRAP

Seanbaby hates bad games so you don't have to

sound off

MASOCHISM

When some people hate themselves, they pay to be filmed getting kicked in the groin by sexy karate women. People who hate themselves but want to keep their groin safe, however, can satisfy their bizarre masochistic urges with the following games, none of which you would ever buy unless there were a terrible yet comedic mix-up at the game store. I haven't seen the demographic research for what type of self-hating person buys games about princesses and mutant fish, but my theory is that these games would sell twice as many copies if they came packaged with a leather whip and a coupon for someone to come over and flagellate you.

—Seanbaby

DISNEY PRINCESS

GBA • THQ — In *Disney Princess*, you can play as Snow White, Cinderella, Ariel, Sleeping Beauty, Belle, or Jasmine on a quest for "the magical tiara of friendship to make dreams come true." As you'd imagine, this involves slowly prancing said princesses through a world devoid of danger. To give you an idea of what kind of amazing abilities are at your disposal, Snow White can both hop *and* sing. The Sing button freezes her in place while she re-creates the sound of a teapot being kicked to death by a car alarm. Her hop propels her inches into the air and ends with her buckling in pain, presumably from some debilitating ailment (my guess—polio). Since I never encountered any platforms low enough for her to actually reach, it might be better to spare her this torment altogether.

Cinderella's section of the game is a maid simulator, and she can both swing a broom and bend over to wipe the floor. Cats wander through the house, and it's up to you to pick up each turd they drop. Hinder their mad feces rampage by stabbing them in the face with your broom, and you can get back to your quest for the magical tiara of friendship to make dreams come true…as long as those dreams are about wiping up poop.

I could explain the other gals' powers, but why bother? Next time the folks at Disney want to help me fantasize about being a princess, maybe they could at least create the kind of monarchy where I, the princess, could call a servant if the kingdom required someone to kill a cat and pocket its feces.

Bottom Line: The *Disney Princess* coloring book was better.

STAKE: FORTUNE FIGHTERS

Xbox • Metro 3D — Whenever I'm assigned a game that isn't based on a cartoon or doll, it worries me—because it means it will suck without relying on Barbie dressing up or a bear entering a tap-dancing competition. *Stake* defied all expectations. It was so bad, I think it might have been an unrelated product that was accidentally labeled as a game. I wouldn't be at all surprised to discover it was a round graham cracker that just happened to run in my Xbox.

First of all, there are no sound effects. I tried to turn off the bouncy elevator music to see if the sound effects actually *did* exist but were just very quiet. I consulted the Options menu, but, despite my best attempts, I could locate neither the Sound Effects: On/Off switch nor the Euthanize Me: Now/Later button.

After being silently defeated by hordes of enemies I couldn't see because of the bad camera, I thought I'd watch the *Stake* Demo mode for tips. The sample fighter jumped across the floor while offscreen fighters bombarded him with fireballs. As it is in life, happy leaps are no match for fireballs, and he eventually died. The game said, "YOU LOSE" and sent me back to the Main menu. Ah, so painful death was the goal! Thanks for clearing that up.

Bottom Line: *Stake's* transcendent crappiness eclipses all to become a part of history's narrative of crap.

MONSTER BASS!

PS1 • XS Games — Sadly, this isn't a game about ass-rumblin' 12-inch woofers. Instead, it's just a normal fishing game, but with a stupid story added about misguided fish scientists who create a species of extra-strong fish in their laboratory. It's up to you to outsmart these monstrous bass.

This makes me think of a fishing-related story from college. At a party, a drunk friend of mine lost his mind. Since he was a 300-pound beer-fueled furniture-smashing machine, we didn't like the idea of him being loose near so many people and things that could be pounded by his ham-fists. Another friend (also drunk) came up with a great idea—put the volatile beast in front of a fishing videogame and give him a 64-ounce mug of beer. Two hours later, the lug wandered out in his boxers (we soon found out this was because he'd peed in his pants) and mumbled to a room full of mostly strangers, "I caught a crappie." He then refilled his mug and went back to the game.

I tell you this story because unlike *Monster Bass!*'s dorky evil-superfish story line, being in a room full of people whose very lives depend on someone catching virtual fish is actually rather engaging. Playing this game, however, is not.

Bottom Line: If you like fishing and you love the idea of fishing games, you still probably won't like this.

classic crap

TAGIN' DRAGON

Poor grammar and spelling afflict many NES games, but *Tagin' Dragon* is one of the few to actually have a spelling error right in its title. If you can track down this obscure piece of excrement…congraturation!

DRAGON TALES: DRAGON ADVENTURES

GBC • NewKidCo — *Dragon Adventures* is an ugly side-scrolling nightmare in which fairies are constantly telling you how to collect butterflies and use ladders. This is a little insulting, since I'd like to think that somewhere during the ladder-exploration process, I would have tried pressing Up or Down. This fairy counseling system works great if you don't understand "buttons" or "ladders" but are somehow still able to read. I reached my advice limit by the third unskippable conversation my dragon had with a fairy about the complicated butterfly-catching process. Top Player Strategy: To catch the butterflies, you must…touch the butterflies. I decided that if *Tales* was going to treat me like I was retarded, I would act retarded. This meant covering the cartridge in peanut butter and racing around the room until someone hugged me.

Bottom Line: If you can correctly spell your name, this is too basic for you.

IMAGINE A WORLD

WE DO.

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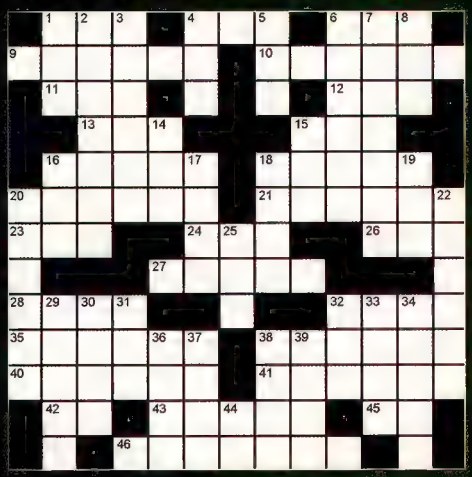
THE MAGAZINE FOR
CORE COMPUTER GAMERS

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA GAME GROUP

PICK ONE UP ON NEWSSTANDS EVERYWHERE

CROSSWORD: SOUL CELEBRATION

(Solution on page 156)



ACROSS

1. GBA's *Lady* __
4. ESRB rating criteria
5. They don't make one big enough for the *DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball* girls
9. May '03 movie/game release we'd like to forget
10. Character from a now-cancelled Xbox game, voiced by No Doubt's Gwen Stefani
11. *Virtua Fighter 4* ranking; also means black belt
12. Queen boss of *Brave Fencer Musashi* (PS1)
13. *Frogger* floater
15. *Metal Gear Solid 2* sniper rifle
16. *Soul Calibur II*'s staff man
18. Rolento's weapon in *Street Fighter Alpha 2*
20. Genesis fighter __ *Moves*
21. Total, as in, number of *Soul Calibur* games won
23. Where you meet Shadow in *Final Fantasy VI*
24. Net-grazing serve in *WTA Tour Tennis*
26. You'll find a *Golden* one in almost any bar
27. Like a close *Soul Calibur* match?
28. Highest score a game can get in *EGM* (two words)
32. Navi in N64 *Zelda*, for one
35. *RollerCoaster* __ for Xbox
38. Case for the Soul Edge?
40. *Ape* __ or *Great* __ (PS2)
41. Seminal puzzler
42. Two-thirds of *Agent Under Fire* James Bond's code name
43. *Final Fantasy* magic maker
45. Featured game, for short
46. Where you'll find Lara? (two words)

DOWN

1. How a Seaman (DC) can get if you don't talk to him
2. Like Eidos' PS2 *Job*
3. Pseudostar of *Terminator* games?
4. Astaroth's weapon of choice
5. *Matrix* shockwave
6. Sony-made PS1 flop
7. Alternative *Soul Calibur* win condition (two words)
8. SNES *Raiser*
14. *Final Fantasy VII* currency
15. *VIP*'s (PS1) __ Anderson, for short
16. Ryu's sparring buddy
17. *South Park Rally* playable kid
18. Friends of *Castlevania*'s Dracula?
19. Up, up, right on an overworld map
20. Midlevel *Phantasy Star Online* healer
22. In-game second-timer increments?
25. Finale
29. NES ring king (before he got thrown in jail)
30. Sega's environmentally conscious dolphin
31. Nintendo's U.S. division, for short
32. Like Huepow to Klonoa?
33. Ico's are below his horns
34. Ultrabasic polearm weapon
36. Videogame tennis or golf tournament
37. You can wear one as a hat in *Evergrace*
38. Part of first *Life Force* boss' "body"
39. *Resident Evil* healer
44. Red Teletubby of PS1 game

■ The Pro 200's built-in calculator subtracts, adds—even divides!

STOP THE PRESSES!

Exclusive look at your next system

Minutes before this issue was out the door, respected publication *Sky Mall* broke a megaton story—the launch of the Pro 200 gaming system—and instantly turned our "Underdogs" article (see page 26) into a waste of three pages. Good night, Game Boy…it was a nice run. Sony, don't even bother with your PSP handheld—and you might want to rethink PlayStation 3 while you're at it. Nothing can touch the sheer gaming power of the $19.95 Pro 200. According to distributor Value Fair, this dynamo handheld uses "super electronics" to play 256 built-in games with "no cartridges to buy—ever!" In your face, Nintendo! And when we saw that the Pro 200's software library includes a roster of "96 *Super Bricks*," "8 *Frogs*," and "8 *Bees*"—well, it's safe to say this thing will crush the competition. Under an avalanche of super bricks.

the pat interview

We called Value Fair (800-578-2386), and, as claimed, an operator was standing by. Her name's Pat.

Pat: Thanks for calling Value Fair. This is Pat speaking. How may I help you?

EGM: Wait a sec...didn't you sell me a football phone 15 years ago?

Pat: [silence]

EGM: OK, we're worried your Pro 200 might be a scam. It says it has 256 games, but it's just called the Pro 200 gaming system. Shouldn't it be called the "Pro 256"?

Pat: Uh-huh, it is a computer. It's… wait, lemme look it up…it's 256 fantastic games, but it has different levels of those games. So it's not really 256 different games.

EGM: All right, but then why "Pro" 200? Do you have to be a professional gamer to play it?

Pat: Umm...I don't think it's played by professionals.

EGM: We'd like to play the *Super Brick* games, but do we have to play through the *Frogs* and the *Bees* to get to the *Bricks*?

Pat: No, these are all separate games. You program to go into each one.

EGM: Can I get the Internet on it?

Pat: No, no, no. It's a handheld game.

EGM: Can I use it to store recipes?

Pat: No.

EGM: Look up horoscopes?

Pat: No.

EGM: Calculate tips?

Pat: No.

EGM: What's your favorite game on it...like, your favorite *Super Brick*?

Pat: I don't play it. I'm not much into these computer games.

EGM: C'mon, this is just 256 versions of *Tetris*, isn't it?

Pat: No, no…not with all the *Bees* and the *Frogs* and whatnot.

It's the games, stupid!

	Pro 200	Game Boy Advance	Sony PSP*
# of *Super Brick* games	96	1	0
# of *Frog* games	8	1	0
# of *Bee* games	8	0	0

* Sony's upcoming PlayStation Portable (artist's rendition)

THE ESRB VIDEO & COMPUTER GAME RATINGS

Find out whether a computer or video game is right for your home.

Learn more about the Entertainment Software Review Board rating system and how games get rated on **www.esrb.org.**

EARLY CHILDHOOD
Titles rated "Early Childhood (EC)" have content that may be suitable for children ages three and older and do not contain any material that parents would find inappropriate.

EVERYONE
Titles rated "Everyone (E)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages six and older. These titles will appeal to people of many ages and tastes. They may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief (for example, slapstick comedy), or some crude language.

TEEN
Titles rated "Teen (T)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

MATURE
Titles rated "Mature (M)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. These products may include more intense violence or language than products in the Teen category. In addition, these titles may also include mature sexual themes.

ADULTS ONLY
Titles rated "Adults Only (AO)" have content suitable only for adults. These products may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Adults Only products are not intended to be sold or rented to persons under the age of 18.

RATING PENDING
Product has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating.

This message is brought to you by the Editors of:

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NEXT MONTH: OCT. 2003 · ISSUE #171

ON SALE SEPTEMBER 2

FEATURES

We've already established contact with developer Zipper Interactive's commando team and briefed you on *SOCOM II*'s urban areas of operation. Next month we drop the intel on all new multiplayer developments. Be there or bunk with Boomer in the brig. Plus, join us as we flash back to the '80s and revisit Eternia, Cybertron, and Caprica. All your childhood chums—from He-Man to Megatron—are set to return to the small screen, and this time you're in control. Can *G.I. Joe* and *Thundercats* be far behind?

PREVIEWS

- Prince of Persia (PS2, Xbox, GC)
- Freedom: Soldiers of Liberty (PS2, Xbox)
- Jak II (PS2)
- Transformers: Armada (PS2)
- Counter-Strike (Xbox)

REVIEWS

- F-Zero GX (GC)
- Dino Crisis 3 (Xbox)
- Backyard Wrestling (PS2, Xbox)
- True Crime: Streets of L.A. (PS2, Xbox, GC)
- Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3 (GBA)

(All planned editorial content is subject to change)

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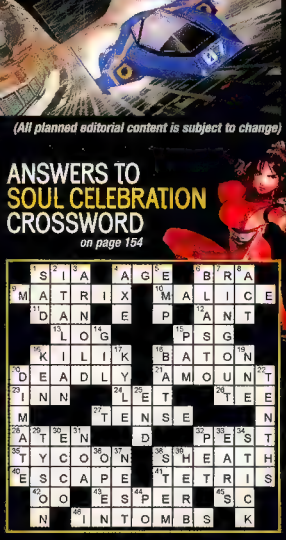

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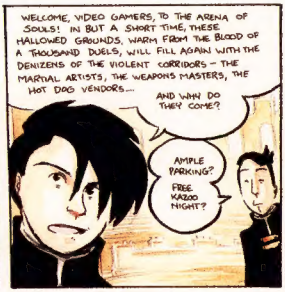

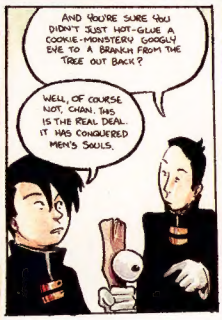

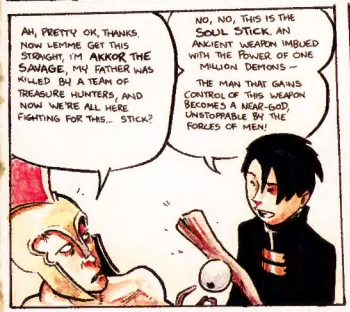

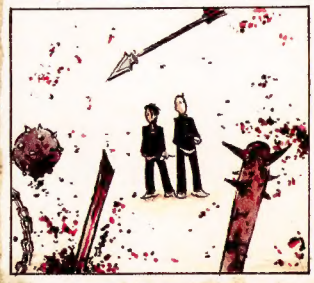

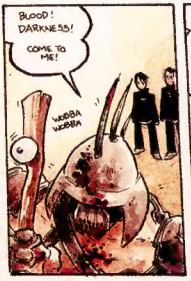

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